

# ***“Exhorted... Again!”***

Acts 3:11-26

February 22, 2015

**Intro:** How many of you just saw God’s grace in action?

Let me ask you a few more questions:

**WHERE** did you see God’s grace?

- **Worship?**
- **Provision?**
- **Opportunity?**
- **BROKENNESS???**

**WHY** do you think God showed you this?

- **Awareness?**
- **Involvement?**
- **Impact?**
- **REPENTANCE???**

**WHAT** do you think I should do next?

- **Fund-raising?**
- **Family-time?**
- **Fun & games?**
- **Faithfully PREACH the Gospel?**

*Friends...*

*the answer to each of those questions is not only “in” Acts 3... the answer IS Acts 3!*

1. We see God's grace AND Christ's love in ALL of the options I listed...
  - The Worship
  - The Provision
  - The Opportunity/Hope
  - AND
  - The BROKENNESS (*see Jesus & the lame man*)
  
2. God shows us His miraculous grace to draw us unto Himself... thru our REPENTANCE & Faith!
  
3. Acts 3 makes my "next step" abundantly clear... As counter-cultural as it may be, I, (like Peter in the immediate aftermath of a miraculous move of God's amazing grace), will not only PROCLAIM the Gospel as Peter did, I will proclaim the Gospel EXACTLY as Peter did!

**T/S:** God's miracles & God's messages ALWAYS point to the One and only MESSIAH!

**PREVIEW:**

- A. *POWER*
- B. *PROCLAMATION*
- C. *PROMISE*

## TIMELESS TRUTH:

*“The WAY of God” is a people who proclaim Jesus, the Christ, and the full context of HIS Gospel Truth-in-Love*

<sup>11</sup> *While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.*

See the transitional value of this verse...

God is commanding attention thru His applied grace!

***Now that he could stand, there was no question where this man stood!***

*- Warren Wiersbe*

- *“While he was clinging...” points back to vv.1-10*
- *Question: Why was he “clinging?”*
  - *Appreciation!*
  - *Association*
  - *Dedication*

- NOTE: watch for Peter & John’s response...
  - They never reprimand the healed man
  - A lack of reprimand proves his love (see answer above)
- *“all the people ran together to them...”*
  - See the sweeping affect of a miraculous witness...
  - Ask yourself: “Am I a miraculous witness?”
- *“full of amazement”*
  - “When the awe is in some, awe-some happens!” –JDP
  - NOTE: “The miracle is IN the man! –JDP
  - “If/when the church looks man-made, it usually is.” –JDP
  - “If/when the church looks like a circus, it usually is.”-JDP
  - Allow God’s Word to be your authenticator.

<sup>12</sup> *But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"*

**We, like Peter, respond where/when God attracts people...**

**NOTE: Peter poses a challenging QUESTION...**

- *“But...”* = Ask yourself: what “contrast” is coming?
- *“when Peter saw this...”* = Answer to the question above:
  - Peter is about to explain a “contrast” with what he saw
  - The question is: What aspect of what he saw is in view
  - NOTE: *“he replied to the people...”* affirms above
  - Don’t miss the syntax... the people need correcting!
- “Men of Israel” = what follows is for everyone coming...
- *“why are you amazed at this”* = another “hook” statement

- Like referring to Jesus as “*the Nazarene*”
- Think of unnatural rhetorical questions as “hooks”
- “Think of biblical sarcasm as holy hooks.” – JDP
- “*or why do you gaze at us*” = Genuine, God-honoring ministry & miracles are ALWAYS God-honoring vs. Christ-centered vs. man-centric
- “*as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk*”
  - NOTE: Peter & John always give away the credit!
  - NOTE: Don’t miss Peter’s “corrective tone”
  - NOTE: Peter acknowledges (2) miraculous attributes:
    - Power – see Acts 1:8
    - Piety – see 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
- Don’t miss this... many of the onlookers would rather attribute the miracle to Peter & John (which makes calls for a celebration), than accept the truth that Peter & John are telling them (which calls for repentance)...
  - Such is human depravity... then
  - Such is human depravity... now
- Lastly, note the fact that no one is questioning the validity of the miracle, just its origin and conduit
  - NOTE: that’s a sign that the man has done his part as the witness...
  - NOTE: now its time for the witness to lead to worship!

<sup>13A</sup> *"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus,*

Peter preaches the miracle’s SOURCE:

1. Creator – sovereign over all
2. Christ - saving & sanctifying work in believers
3. Creation – submissive (always) to Creator Christ

<sup>13B</sup> *the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.*

Peter preaches SIN:

1. Personal & cultural
2. Against God whenever against Jesus
3. Worldly vs. worshipfully

- This verse has (3) distinct parts:
  - Contextual – there is no question, after Peter’s strong, affirming reference to THE God of their heritage, that the onlookers have a responsibility to respond appropriately to what they are seeing....
  - Christological – Peter is laying the contextual groundwork for the biblical Christology that is about to follow... “Your God is IN the work of this JESUS...”
  - Confrontational – Peter first forces them to acknowledge that “their God” is in this... Next, that Jesus is the Origin & His Spirit is the Conduit of the miracle... Next, here, Peter calls the onlookers (“men of Israel”) to accept their responsibility/accountability for the rejection of Jesus.
    - “*Delivered*” – “whom you delivered...”
    - “*Disowned*” – “whom you delivered & disowned”
    - “*Decided*” – (after Pilate) “decided to release Him

- Don't miss just how confrontational this verse is...
  - By linking Jesus to the God of their fathers, Peter had now linked their delivering & disowning of Jesus to the highest degree of sin against God.
  - Moreover, after forcing them to acknowledge (or at least hear of) their abomination, Peter adds on... in essence, "The Roman oppressors were going to let God's Servant go... BUT, you all INSISTED that God's Servant be put to death..."
  
- Political Correctness???
  - Where is the political correctness in Peter's preaching?
  - Why isn't Peter starting with their "felt needs?"
  - Wouldn't have been better if the Apostles had first built up some attraction-model ministry "tools," so as to have people, places, and programs inline, ready to sign folks up and help them start to feel good about themselves?
  - Why in the world would anyone start with the sin issue?
  
- Question: "What's the difference between the early Church here in Acts, and the church of our day?"
  - Answer: degrees of purity & perversion
  - Answer: they did things Christ's way... which represents & builds Christ's Church...
  - Answer: most today do things in the way of the world... which represents & builds the world's church.

<sup>14</sup> *"But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,*

## Peter preaches the role & responsibility of CHOICE

Our choices, when it comes to Christ, are eternal!

1. Choosing a murderer vs. Messiah is deadly!
2. Choosing the world over worship will wreck us!

- This verse is about:
  - Contrast – “*but*” (God’s will vs. man’s way)
  - Clarity – “*disowned the Holy & Righteous One*”
    - Peter now clarifies his earlier “disowned”
    - Peter clarifies his Christology
  - Confrontation –
    - Peter holds them accountable for Christ’s cross
    - Peter is saying in essence: “You murdered God and granted a murderer God’s place of grace & freedom”
    - Peter is saying: “You wanted a murderer more than the Messiah!”
    - In their context, this is about as confrontational as one could get...

<sup>15</sup> *but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.*

## Peter preaches the RESURRECTION

1. See the Father
  2. See the Son
  3. See the Spirit (in the witnesses – Acts 1:8)
- See (3) more continuing themes...
    - Confrontation – “*you chose to put to death the Prince of Life*”
    - Christology –
      - Per Peter, you killed the “*Prince of Life*” (Jesus)
      - “*whom God raised from the dead*” = Messiah!
    - Christianity/Church –
      - See Acts 1:8 (again, again, & again...)
      - “Our faith is built on the facts!” - JDP

<sup>16</sup> *"And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.*

### Peter preaches FAITH (in Jesus' name)

1. Christian power comes thru Christian faith
2. Another's faith CAN really “bless” you...
3. But, only personal faith can embrace saving grace

NOTE: People are often “blessed” while NOT saved...

- Israelites dying in the desert for unbelief...
  - 9 out of 10 lepers...
  - Blind man in John 9... until end of the chapter.
- See the following reflections of faith:
    - Basis of Faith – see Ephesians 2:8-10
    - Object of Faith – there’s power in the name of Jesus!
    - Conduit of Faith – “*the faith that comes through Him*”
    - Result of Faith – “*perfect health*” (...physical metaphor)
  - NOTE: miraculous healing does not walk with a limp or with crutches!
    - “*perfect health*” = a true miracle
    - “*perfect health*” = a complete miracle
  - NOTICE: Peter’s faith was enough to bring about blessing, but that is not to say that Peter’s faith brought salvation to this man. One’s salvation can only come through one’s own saving-faith.

<sup>17</sup> *"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also."*

Peter preaches MERCY

Let every believer embrace the implications herein:

- Past
- Present
- Future

- “Eternal ‘truth in love’ is laced with empathy.” –JDP
- “*And now*” = transition... contrast is coming
- NOTE: Peter is a relational bridge-builder... “*brothers*”
  - Peter builds on their nationalistic brotherhood...
  - Peter knows that they are “related” on one level AND totally separated on another
- NOTE: Peter offers us a biblical blueprint for dealing with those whose sin, be they ever so bad, were committed in ignorance
  - First, note that such a category does exist...
  - Next, recognize that all sin is born out of some form and degree of ignorance (on one would choose to sin if they truly understood its past, present, and long-term cost)
  - Peter is also extending the message of empathy and understanding to the crowd’s forefathers...
- SPECIAL WARNING:
  - See the damage that could (and often is) done by pulling this verse out of context...
  - Continue reading... see that Peter is in NO WAY offering an EXCUSE for sinner’s ignorance.
  - “Empathy should never morph into empowering.” –JDP

<sup>18</sup> *"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.*

### Peter preaches about PROPHECY & the CROSS of Christ

1. All of prophecy pointed to Christ & His cross
  2. Christ was always expected to suffer
    - a. Genesis 3:15
    - b. Isaiah 53
  3. Christ's crucifixion is a victorious fulfillment of God prophetic & providential plan!
    - a. Again, see Isaiah 53
    - b. Note: this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time Peter has preached the victory found in the cross (Acts 2)
- "But" = another contrast is being introduced...
  - Peter is contrasting their "actions in ignorance" with their "accountability & responsibility"
    - While you acted in ignorance... you should not have been ignorant.
    - You should have known better...
    - At best, the onlookers are akin to those found guilty of "negligent homicide"
    - At worst, the onlookers are liable for 2<sup>nd</sup> degree murder
    - In reality, many in the crowd would have been guilty of first degree murder (having been on the scene shouting: "Crucify Him!")
  - Don't miss this biblical elevation of God's Word...

- God spoke beforehand thru the prophets... (O.T.)
  - God spoke beforehand to inform His people
  - God spoke beforehand to align our expectations (Is.53)
  - God spoke beforehand to serve as proof in the present!
- Once again, see the subtle declaration of the biblical “both/and” that calls into focus BOTH God’s sovereignty AND man’s sinful responsibility for Christ’s death & cross.

<sup>19</sup> *"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;*

Peter preaches:      REPENTANCE  
                                  RESTORATION  
                                  ATONEMENT  
                                  REFRESHING  
                                  PRESENCE of the LORD

- See the pregnant treasures & implications of this verse:
  - “*Therefore*”
  - “*Repent*”
  - “*Return*”
  - “*So that*”
  - “*Your sins may be wiped away*”
  - “*In order that*”
  - “*Times of refreshing may come*”
  - “*From the presence of the Lord*”

- “Therefore”
  - What is the therefore there for?
  - “Therefore” = a mini biblical crescendo - JDP
- “REPENT”
  - Confrontational preaching... again, the biblical norm.
  - NOTE: Peter has yet to put any “honey” out there...
  - We need a biblical definition of “repent” today...

**REPENTANCE** A feeling of regret, a changing of the mind, or a turning from sin to God. As a feeling of regret the term can apply even to God. In the days preceding the flood, God was sorry that He had created the human race ([Gen. 6:6-7](#)). He later regretted that he had made Saul the king over Israel ([1 Sam. 15:11,35](#)). God also repented in the sense of changing His mind ([Ex. 32:14](#)). Most occurrences of the term in the Bible, however, do not refer to God but to people. These also do not indicate mere regret or a change of mind; they mean a reorientation of the sinner to God. In this more common sense, then, God does not repent like humans ([1 Sam. 15:29](#)).

**Old Testament** In ancient Israel repentance was first expressed corporately. When national calamities such as famine, drought, defeat, or a plague of locusts arose, the people did not feel responsible individually for these catastrophes. Rather, they sensed that the incidents were caused by the guilt of the nation. All shared the responsibility and, consequently, the ritual of repentance. Fasting, the wearing of sackcloth (the traditional attire for mourning), the scattering of ashes ([Isa. 58:5](#); [Neh. 9:1](#); [Dan. 9:3](#)), and the recitation of prayers and psalms in a penitential liturgy characterized this collective experience of worship.

With the use of such outward tokens of repentance, however, the danger of sham or pretense also arose. Ritual not accompanied by a genuine attitude of repentance was empty. Against such misleading and, therefore, futile expressions of remorse, the eighth-century prophets spoke out. Their attacks upon feigned worship and their calls for genuine contrition on the part of the individual gave flower to the characteristic biblical concept of repentance. What was needed was not ritual alone, but the active involvement of the individual in making a radical change within the heart ([Ezek. 18:31](#)) and in seeking a new direction for one's life. What was demanded was a turning from sin and at the same time a *turning* to God. For the prophets, such a *turning* or *conversion* was not just simply a change within a person; it was openly manifested in justice, kindness, and humility ([Mic. 6:8](#); [Amos 5:24](#); [Hos. 2:19-20](#)).

**New Testament** A direct connection between the prophets and the New Testament is found in John the Baptist. Appearing in the wilderness, he, like they, issued the call to his own generation for this radical kind of turning. He baptized those who by confessing their sins responded to his invitation ([Mark 1:4-5](#)). Likewise, he expected that those who had made this commitment would demonstrate by their actions the change which they had made in their hearts ([Luke 3:10-14](#)). He differed, though, from the prophets in that his message of repentance was intricately bound up with his expectation of the imminent coming of the Messiah ([Luke 3:15-17](#); see also [Acts 19:4](#)).

The Messiah came also preaching a message of repentance ([Mark 1:15](#)). Stressing that all men needed to repent ([Luke 13:1-5](#)), Jesus summoned his followers to *turn* and become like children ([Matt. 18:3](#)). He defined His ministry in terms of calling sinners to repentance ([Luke 5:32](#)). Moreover, He

illustrated His understanding of repentance in the parable of the prodigal who *returned* to the father ([Luke 15:11-32](#)). Like John, he insisted that the life that was changed was obvious by the “fruit” that it bore ([Luke 6:20-45](#)).

Jesus also differed from His predecessors in His proclamation of repentance. He related it closely to the arrival of the kingdom of God ([Mark 1:14-15](#)) and specifically associated it with one’s acceptance of Him. Those who were unrepentant were those who rejected Him ([Luke 10:8-15](#); [11:30-32](#)); those who received Him were the truly repentant. In His name repentance and forgiveness were to be proclaimed to all nations ([Luke 24:47](#)).

Acts shows this proclamation was made. Peter ([Acts 2:38](#); [3:19](#); [5:31](#)) and Paul ([Acts 17:30](#); [20:21](#)) told Jews and Gentiles alike “that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” ([Acts 26:20](#) NAS). The apostolic preaching virtually identified repentance with belief in Christ: both resulted in the forgiveness of sins ([Acts 2:38](#); [10:43](#)).

“Repentance” is infrequently found in Paul’s writings and never in John. Both speak of faith which entails both a rejection of sin and a positive response to God. Other apostolic writings also note the relationship of faith and repentance ([Acts 20:21](#); [Heb. 6:1](#)). In 1 John, moreover, confession of sins is tantamount to repentance from sins ([1:9](#)).

**Other Usages** Not all references refer to turning to God from sin. Judas repented of what he had done ([Matt. 27:3](#)). The Greek term differs from the normal word for repentance. In this context the meaning is regret or remorse; Judas’ repentance was not the type that leads towards salvation.

Paul described an earlier letter he had sent to the Corinthians which caused them grief, but which eventually led them to repentance. Here Paul described a change in the Corinthians' attitude about him ([2 Cor. 7:8-13](#)). Their repentance resulted in their reconciliation with him.

Renewal of commitment or reaffirmation of faith seems to be the meaning of repentance in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation ([2:5,16,21-22](#); [3:3,19](#)). Twice the letters call for the readers to remember and thereby to return to what they had been. The call is for rededication and not initial conversion.

Naymond Keathley  
- Holman Bible Dictionary.

- “RETURN”
  - NOTE the ramifications of this word: “return”
    - By definition, “return” implies the blessing of familiarity
      - ~ The “men of Israel” knew God’s blessing
      - ~ Peter is calling them back to a relational place of obedience & blessing
    - Repenting is so much more than mere remorse, it also includes a coming-to Christ. In the case of the Israelites, this can be theologically deemed a “return.” In the case of we gentiles, while it is not a technical return, the same turning-from & turning-to dynamic is covered in the biblical term “repent”
- “*so that*” = see the “affect” the follows the “cause”
  - Biblical “*so that*” clauses reveal the purposes of God.
  - Look deep into the “*so that*” passages as a way of better understanding the character of God!

- *“your sins may be wiped away”*
  - NOTE: nothing less than salvation & damnation weigh in the balance of adherence to Peter’s admonishment
  - Please do not miss the grace, mercy, hope, & love that is embedded in this conditional invitation...
    - NOTE the conditions... “Repent & Return”
    - NOTE “repent & return” = believe & receive
  - “wiped away” = GONE!
    - *“as far as the east is from the west”*
    - *“they will be remembered no more”*
    - *“He who the Son sets free is free indeed!”*
    - *“...this is AMAZING Grace!”*
  
- *“in order that”*
  - This is another purpose clause of God...
  - This phrase reveals both God’s will & our way
  - This phrase connects the condition & the consequence
  
- *“a time of refreshing will come”*
  - See the “Fruit of the Spirit”
  - *“the peace that passes understanding”*
  - See again, “God’s love is for our good.” – JDP
  - *“will come”* implies there is no true time of refreshing without a right/righteous relationship with the Lord.
  
- *“from the presence of the Lord”*
  - What a loaded clause...
  - Where does refreshing come from? Answer: Him!
  - How does one find this refreshing? Answer:
    - Repent & Return (believe & receive)
    - Come into His presence
    - There is NO other way (see John 14:6)

<sup>20</sup> *and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you,*

## Peter preaches the SECOND COMING of CHRIST

### Peter preaches the highest CHRISTOLOGY

- “and” = conjunction... God is about to add on...
  - NOTE: the blessing of v.19 is about to get even better!
  - Ask yourself, how could v.19 be enhanced...
- “that He” = “the God of our fathers”
- “that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you”
  - God the Father sends God the Son...
  - NOTE the inclusive relationship here:
    - God the Father – sends
    - God the Son - saves
    - You the sinner – surrenders (repent, & believe)
- Don’t miss this... v.20 is all about Christ 2<sup>nd</sup> coming/return

<sup>21</sup> *whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.*

## Peter preaches the ASCENSION

Peter preaches the reality of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father, interceding on our behalf!

## Peter preaches heaven

*“the period of restoration”* = perfection re-established

- Another 3-part verse:
  - *“whom heaven must receive”*
    - See the direct reference embedded here:
      - ~ Christ incarnate (God came down in flesh)
      - ~ Christ crucified
      - ~ Christ resurrected
      - ~ Christ ascended
  - *“until the period of restoration of all things”*
    - NOTE: *“until”* = providential waiting...
    - *“until the period”* is a direct reference to Jesus coming again!
    - When Jesus returns:
      - ~ *“restoration”* – creation returns to perfect
      - ~ *“of all things”*
        - a. All means ALL
        - b. Christ’s return brings about the completeness of God’s glorious plan!
  - *“about which God spoke by the mouth of the His holy prophets from ancient times”*
    - This phrase is loaded with meaningful impact:
      - ~ *“about which”* refers to the complete gospel & its various components, nuances, and inferences!

- ~ “*God spoke*”
  - a. First, the reality: “God speaks!”
  - b. Second reality: “God spoke”
  - c. Next reality: God speaks thru people!
  - d. Further: see 2 Timothy 3:16-17
    - ! Explains purpose of God’s Word
    - ! Purpose = spoken/written Word
- ~ “*by the mouth of His holy prophets*”
  - a. “*by mouth*” = validates spoken Words
  - b. “*mouth of His*”
    - ! Defines definitive conditions...
    - ! Condition = must be HIS prophet
    - ! NOT all “prophets” were God’s!
    - ! Again... “Beware the Wolves!”
  - c. “Holy” (see definition below)

**HOLY** A characteristic unique to God’s nature which becomes the goal for human moral character. The idea of “holy” is important for an understanding of God, of worship, and of the people of God in the Bible. **Holy has four distinct meanings. First is “to be set apart.”** This applies to places where God is present, like the Temple and the tabernacle, and to things and persons related to those holy places or to God Himself. **Next, it means to be “perfect, transcendent, or spiritually pure, evoking adoration and reverence.”** This applies primarily to God, but secondarily to saints or godly people. **Next, it means something or someone who evokes “veneration or awe, being frightening beyond belief.”** This is clearly the application to God and is the primary meaning of “holy.” It is continued in **the last definition, “filled with superhuman and potential fatal power.”** This speaks of God, but also of places or things or persons which have been set apart by God’s presence. A saint is a holy person. To be sanctified is to be made holy.

In the Old Testament “holy” is important in the parts related to priests and worship such as the Book of Leviticus, especially chapter 16. It is found in the prophets: Isaiah’s title for God, “the Holy One of Israel,” and the adoration of the Seraphim in [Isaiah 6](#). The word is also repeatedly in Psalms.

God is holy. Fire is the symbol of holy power. Jealousy, wrath, remoteness, cleanliness, glory, and majesty are related to it. He is unsearchable, incomprehensible, incomparable, great, wonderful, and exalted. His name is Holy.

Holiness is in tension with relational personhood. Holiness tends toward separation and uniqueness. Personhood determines relations and close communion. Holiness inspires awe and fear. Personhood inspires love and the wish to be near. Both are in the Bible as necessary ways to think of and experience God. Both are necessary if one is to avoid shallow, one-sided thinking about God. Neither holiness nor personhood alone can do justice to the biblical portrayal of God. Both in their mutual tension help capture a more adequate doctrine and experience of God.

### The Holy

- Cannot be comprehended rationally.
- Sensed & protected against. Avoided in contact & sight.
- Sins must be expiated and purged.
- Beyond time—yet claims sacred times.
- Beyond space—yet claims sacred space.
- Life-threatening—yet strangely necessary to life.
- Repels—yet fascinates and draws.
- Always awesome, mysterious, unnerving.
- Here one worships and submits.
- Portrayed in the sacrificial system, in tabernacle, Temple, priesthood, and in the cross.

## The Personal

- Understood in terms of relationships.
- One can receive, respond, accept, and love.
- Sins can be forgiven with fellowship restored.
- Redemption shows will, action, goal.
- Creator—creature.
- Father—child.
- Judge—sinner, rebel.
- Savior—needy suppliant.
- Lord—servant.
- Here one believes, loves, serves.

Portrayed in the incarnation and in the gift of the Holy Spirit, in Israel as the people of God, and in the church. The biblical view combines these. [Leviticus 17-25](#) presents all laws to be kept so that persons may be holy as God is holy. Holiness in God is seen as moral perfection in [Psalm 89:35](#). Holiness in believing Christians was attained through the cross and is to be preserved in clean and moral living. Holiness comes to imply the fullness and completeness of God and godliness in all its facets and meanings.

Thus **“holy” defines the godness of God**. It also defines places where God is present. For the holy God to be present among His people special holy places were set apart where God and people could safely come together. The tabernacle and Temple filled this purpose. Special restrictions on access were established for the safety of the worshipers. Rules of sacrifice and cleanliness helped them prepare for this contact. A special place, the holy of holies, was completely cut off from common access. Only the high priest could enter there, and then only once a year after special preparation.

Holy also applied to persons who were to meet God. The priests had to undergo special rites that sanctified and purified them for service in the Temple. **God wanted all His people to share His presence. They had to be instructed in the character and actions what would accomplish that.**

**The Holiness Code ([Lev. 17-25](#)) commands the people to obey God's laws in all parts of life in order to be "holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" ([19:2](#)). Here holiness is seen to include a moral character as well as cultic purity. Sin and disobedience works the opposite and has to be cleansed or atoned by sacrifice ([Lev. 1-7](#); [16](#)).**

An understanding of holiness is needed for New Testament study to appreciate the cross and the results of God's work through the cross. The Gospels make clear that Jesus came to save His people from their sins ([Matt. 1:21](#); [Luke 1:31-35](#)). The crucifixion is portrayed as Christ shedding His blood and giving His body for the remission of sins ([Matt. 26:26-29](#); [Mark 14:22-25](#); [Luke 22:19-20](#)). Faith in Christ is portrayed as acceptance of His full atonement for sin ([1 John 2:2](#); [3:5](#); [Rev. 5:9](#)).

**The Holy Spirit is the agent of holiness for the church and its leaders ([Acts 1:8](#); [2:4](#); [5:32](#); [13:2-4](#)). He keeps the church pure ([Acts 5:1-11](#)). He promotes holiness in its members ([1 Cor. 6:19](#); [1 Thess. 4:7](#)).**

**Christians are called to holy living ([1 Cor. 1:2](#); [3:17](#)).**  
They are saints who lead godly, righteous lives. Being sanctified, or made holy, is a work of the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ's atonement that calls for obedient submission from those who have been saved.

**Christians are holy because of their calling in Christ, because of His atonement for their sins, and because of the continual ministrations of the Holy Spirit.**

They are holy inasmuch as they receive and submit to these saving and sanctifying agents.

- John D. W. Watts

- Holman Bible Dictionary.

d. “*His holy prophets*” (see definition)

**PROPHECY, PROPHETS** Reception and declaration of a word from the Lord through a direct prompting of the Holy Spirit and the human instrument thereof.

**Old Testament** Three key terms are used of the prophet. *Ro’eh* and *hozeh* are translated as “seer.” The most important term, *nabi*, is usually translated “prophet.” It probably meant **“one who is called to speak.”**

**History** Moses, perhaps Israel’s greatest leader, was a prophetic prototype (Acts 3:21-24). He appeared with Elijah in the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8). Israel looked for a prophet like Moses (Deut. 34:10).

Prophets also played a role in the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land. The prophetess Deborah predicted victory, pronounced judgment on doubting Barak, and even identified the right time to attack (Judg. 4:6-7,9,14). Samuel, who led Israel during its transition to monarchy, was a prophet, priest, and judge (1 Sam. 3:20; 7:6,15). He was able to see into the future by vision (3:11-14) and to ask God for thunder and rain (12:18). Samuel led in victory over the Philistines (1 Sam. 7), and God used him to anoint kings.

Gad and Nathan served as prophets to the king. Elijah and Elisha offered critique and advice for the kings. **The prophets did more than predict the future; their messages called Israel to honor God. Their prophecies were not general principles but specific words corresponding to Israel's historical context.**

Similarly the classical or writing prophets were joined to history. **Israel's political turmoil provided the context for the writing prophets.** The Assyrian rise to power after 750 B.C. furnished the focus of the ministries of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. The Babylonian threat was the background and motive for much of the ministry of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The advent of the Persian Empire in the latter part of the sixth century set the stage for prophets such as Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Thus the prophets spoke for God throughout Israel's history.

**The prophets influenced almost every institution of Israel, despite the fact that they were often viewed with contempt:** they were locked up (Jer. 37), ignored (Isa. 6:9-13), and persecuted (1 Kings—19:1-2).

In addition to serving judges and kings, the prophets also addressed Israel's worship. They criticized vain worship (Amos 5:23-24) and priestly failures (Amos 7:10; Mal. 2). The word of the Lord was also spoken in worship (Pss. 50:5; 60:6; 81:6-10; 91:14-16; 95:8-11). The prophets' call to covenant faithfulness revealed an awareness of the law (Isa. 58:6-9; Ezek. 18; Mic. 6:6-8; Hos. 6:6; Amos 2:4; 5:21-24).

Prophets formed guilds or schools (2 Kings 4:38; 1 Sam. 10:5; 19:20). While most references to prophetic schools belong to the period of the monarchy, there is some evidence to believe the schools continued (Jer. 23:13-14). The mere existence of the books of prophecy is probably due in part to

the prophets' helpers ([Jer. 36:4](#)). Perhaps their words were recorded because they provided a moral challenge to the entire nation and not merely to a king or individual. Surely **once the prophet's words were written, they were not ignored but continually studied and reapplied.**

**The Experience of the Prophet** Prophets generally shared several key experiences and characteristics. (1) **An essential mark of a prophet was a call from God.** Attempting to prophesy without such a commission was false prophecy ([Jer. 14:14](#)). The prophets were at times allowed to see into the throne room or heavenly court ([Isa. 6:1-7](#); [1 Kings 22:19-23](#); [Jer. 23:18-22](#); compare [Amos 3:7](#); [Job 1:6-12](#); [2:1-6](#); [2 Cor. 12:1-4](#); [Rev. 1:1-3](#); [22:18-19](#)). (2) **Prophets received a word from God through many means—direct declarations, visions, dreams, or an appearance of God.** The great variety in prophetic experience prohibits any oversimplification; ecstatic experiences were not mandatory for receiving God's word. (3) **Prophets spoke the word of God. They were primarily spokespersons who called His people to obedience by appealing to Israel's past and future.** For example, God's past blessing and future judgment should provoke social justice and mercy for the disadvantaged. (4) **Prophets relayed God's message by deed as well as by word. They worked symbolic acts which served as dramatic, living parables.** Hosea's marriage taught about God's relationship with Israel ([Hos. 2:1-13](#); see also [Isa. 20:1-3](#); [Ezek. 4:1-3](#); [Jer. 19:10-11](#)). (5) **The prophets also performed miracles which confirmed their message.** While some prophets like Moses ([Ex. 4:1-9](#)) and Elijah ([1 Kings 17](#)) worked many miracles, virtually all prophets occasionally saw a miraculous fulfillment of God's word ([Isa. 38:8](#)). This miracle-working capacity also included healing ([1 Kings 17:17-22](#); [2 Kings 5](#); [Matt. 12:22-29](#)). (6) **Prophets also conveyed the word of God by writing** ([Isa.](#)

**8:1; Ezek. 43:11).** (7) **Prophets were to minister to their people. They were to test God's peoples' lives (Jer. 6:27) and be watchmen for moral compromise (Ezek. 3:17).** Particularly important was the role of intercessor—sometimes even for the prophet's enemy (1 Kings 13:6; 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Amos 7:2; Jer. 14:17-20,21; Isa. 59:16). (8) Throughout Israel's history genuine prophets had ecstatic experiences.

**False Prophets** Distinguishing between false and true prophets was very difficult, though several tests of authenticity emerge in the Old Testament. **The true prophet must be loyal to the biblical faith directing one to worship Yahweh alone (Deut. 13:1-3).** A second test required that **the words of a true prophet be fulfilled (Deut. 18:22; Jer. 42:1-6; Ezek. 33:30-33).** We must remember that this is a difficult test to apply. There were often long lapses between predictions and fulfillment (Mic. 3:12; Jer. 26:16-19). Some predictions seemed very unlikely, and others were conditional—based upon the hearer's response (Jonah 3:4-5). Furthermore, prophets could behave inappropriately (Num. 12:1-2; 20:1-12; Jer. 15:19-21; 38:24-27). Prophets appeared ambivalent at times when simply delivering the word of God as it was given (2 Kings 20:1-6). **Also one could predict correctly while not being loyal to Yahweh (Deut. 13:1-3).** Accurate prediction was not a final test. **Other tests included agreement with previous prophets' words (Jer. 28:8), good character (Mic. 3:11), and a willingness to suffer because of faithfulness (1 Kings 22:27-28; Jer. 38:3-13).** Similarly, the New Testament believers had to distinguish true prophecy (1 John 4:1; 1 Cor. 14:29). See ***False Prophet.***

**Hints for Interpretation: Prophets intended to evoke faith by proclamation, not merely to predict the future.**

Thus reading the prophets with a lustful curiosity is inappropriate. Our primary desire must be to know God, not just the facts of the future.

The interpreter must remember the limited perspective of the prophet. **The prophets were not all-knowing but all-telling—that is they told what God had told them to tell.**

**Prophecy has a progressive character. One must seek to read prophecy in light of its whole, deriving partial insight from different prophets.**

Prophecy must also be read in its historical context.

Particular attention must be paid to the intention of the prophet. For example, a prophet may rebuke another country to offer assistance to Israel ([Isa. 46-47](#)), make Israel examine its own conduct ([Amos 1-2](#)), or to bring a nation to repentance ([Jonah 3:4,8-9](#)).

Caution must be exercised when reading predictive prophecy because prophecy often has more than one fulfillment. **Many prophecies have an immediate application to their own situation and are also applicable to another context.** Thus the prediction that Christ is born of a virgin ([Matt. 1:23](#)) also had a fulfillment in Isaiah's day ([Isa. 8:3](#)). Similarly prophecies of "the day of the Lord" had several fulfillments (partial) which also foreshadowed a final fulfillment ([Obad. 15](#); [Joel 1:15](#); [2:1](#); [Zeph. 1:7,14](#); [Ezek. 30:3](#); compare [2 Pet. 3:10](#)).

Modern evangelicals understand predictive prophecies in several ways. (1) Some prophecies seem to have a direct, literal fulfillment: the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem ([Matt. 2:5-6](#); [Mic. 5:2](#)). (2) Not all predictions were fulfilled

literally. Jesus taught that the prediction about Elijah's return was fulfilled by John the Baptist and not a literal Elijah (Matt. 11:13-15; Mal. 3:1-4). Similarly, Paul applied prophecies about literal, national Israel to the church (Rom. 9:25-26; Hos. 1:9-10, 2:23). The literal father of Israel, Abraham, was seen to be the father of the believing church (Rom. 4:11,16; Gal. 3:7). This distinctively Christian reading was thought to be legitimate because of Christ's fulfillment and interpretation of the Old Testament (Luke 4:17-21). (3) This Christian reading of the Old Testament often takes the form of typological interpretation. The New Testament authors believed Old Testament events, persons, or things foreshadowed the later Christian story. Thus, they used the images of the Old Testament to understand the New Testament realities. Christ can be compared to Adam (1 Cor. 15:22-23; see 10:11). (4) Some readers believe that Old Testament words take on a "fuller sense" or meaning. Old Testament expressions may have a divine significance, unforeseen by the Old Testament author, which comes to light only after God's later word or deed. See *Typology*.

**New Testament** The word *prophetes* means "to speak before" or "to speak for." Thus it refers to one who speaks for God or Christ.

**Prophets were also called *pneumatics* (*pneumatikos*), "spiritual ones" (1 Cor. 14:37). The prophets played a foundational role in the early church (1 Cor. 12:28-31; Eph. 4:11; 2:20).**

Due to the presumed prophetic silence in the time between the Testaments, the coming of Jesus is seen as an inbreaking

of the Spirit's work especially visible in prophecy. For example, in Luke the angel's visitation and prediction ([1:11,26-27](#)) provoked Mary and Zecharias to prophesy ([1:46-67](#), [67-79](#)). After an angelic visitation to the shepherds, the prophet and prophetess declared Jesus to be the redemption Israel awaited ([2:10-12,25,36-38](#)). John the Baptist also predicted that Jesus would baptize in the Spirit ([Matt. 3:11](#)).

**Jesus called Himself a prophet ([Luke 13:33](#)).** His miracles and discernment were rightly understood as prophetic ([John 4:19](#)). He taught not by citing expert rabbis, but with His own prophetic authority ([Mark 1:22](#); [Luke 4:24](#)).

**The early believers saw the outpouring of the Spirit ([Acts 2:17](#)) as a fulfillment of Joel's prediction that all God's people, young and old, male and female, would prophesy.**

**These gifts may intensify at the end of time as will evil.**

While any Christian might occasionally receive a prophecy, some seem to have a special gift of prophecy ([1 Cor. 12:29](#); [13:2](#)). Prophets function primarily in the worship of the church ([Acts 13:2](#)). They predict ([Acts 11:28](#); [20:23](#); [27:22-26](#)), announce judgments ([Acts 13:11](#); [28:25-28](#)), act symbolically ([Acts 21:10-11](#)), and receive visions ([Acts 9:10-11](#); [2 Cor. 12:1](#)). Prophetic insights led to missionary efforts ([Acts 13:1-3](#); [10:10-17](#); [15:28,32](#)). While teaching and prophecy are different, they also can be related ([Acts 13:1-2](#); [Rev. 2:20](#)). Some prophets "preached" lengthy messages ([Acts 15:32](#)) and gave exposition to biblical texts ([Luke 1:67-79](#); [Eph. 3:5](#); [Rom. 11:25-36](#)).

The prophets used phrases such as "the Lord says" or "the Holy Spirit says" as introductory formulas for prophetic

insight into the future ([Acts 21:11](#)), or for inspired adaptation of an Old Testament text ([Heb. 3:7](#)).

New Testament prophecy was limited ([1 Cor. 13:9](#)); it was to be evaluated by the congregation ([1 Cor. 14:29](#); [1 Thess. 5:20-21](#)). One may even respond inappropriately to prophecy ([Acts 21:12](#)). **The supreme test for prophecy is loyalty to Christ ([1 Cor. 12:3](#); [Rev. 19:10](#)).** Some Christians have the gift of discernment ([1 Cor. 12:10](#)). Jesus said prophets could be known by their fruit ([Matt. 7:15-20](#)). Paul demanded orderly, Christ-honoring, upbuilding prophecy which submits to apostolic authority ([1 Cor. 14:26-40](#)). **Thus prophecy is not without restraint.** Circumstance may even demand that the dress of men and women prophets be stipulated ([1 Cor. 11:5-7](#)). **Prophecy outside of apostolic authority can be safely ignored; thus prophecy is not a threat to Scripture's special authority ([1 Cor. 14:38-39](#); [2 Tim. 3:16](#); [2 Pet. 1:20-21](#)).**

- Randy Hatchett

- Holman Bible Dictionary.

<sup>22</sup> *"Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you.*

Peter preaches the INCARNATION of Christ...

Peter preaches OBEDIENCE (see Matthew 28:18-20)

- Obviously, we need to embrace the quote at face value...
  - Moses said that God said... Jesus was coming!
  - Moses said that God said... the holy will heed!
  - Peter is quoting Moses per Deuteronomy
- Be careful not to make too much or too little of this quote
- This is not an allegorical reference, but rather, an acknowledgment of an O.T. “prophetic & historical type”
- Don’t miss the “*everything He says to you*” link to the Great Commission per Matthew 28:18-20!

<sup>23</sup> *'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'*

Peter preaches HELL

Somebody has to pay for each & every sin...

Annihilation is not an option...

A. CONSEQUENCES:

- “*And*” = conjunction... linking past/present verses
  - The consequences that follow cannot be disconnected from the conditions/facts revealed in v.22

- Many liberal theologians and deceived churchgoers try to ignore the connection between faithful obedience and blessing. In the same way, said souls also try feverishly to divorce disobedience from its wrathful consequences (here noted)
- “*it WILL be*” = declarative statement of fact!
  - God’s declarations are guaranteed facts!
  - A fact not yet realized is no less a fact...
  - God (per 2 Timothy 3:16) is making a PROMISE!
- “*that EVERY soul*” = ALL Inclusive proclamation...
  - What follows applies to every human being!
  - Don’t forget, it is GOD who is proclaiming here.
  - The Creator is speaking to ALL of His creation!
- “*that does not heed that prophet*” = Conditional filter
  - Categorical disobedience of Christ & His gospel!
  - All who reject the Redeemer... per the Redeemer!
    - ~ You can’t (with integrity) claim Christ if, in fact, Christ won’t claim you...
    - ~ God’s Word speaks for and defines Christ’s conditions & fruit of obedience:
      - a. Obedience
      - b. Love for one-another
      - c. Koinonia (supernatural unity)
      - d. Fruit of the Spirit....
- “*shall be utterly destroyed*” = eternal torment
  - Just imagine... this is God making an emphatic statement!
    - ~ How big are God’s exclamation marks? -JDP
    - ~ When God says it will be “utterly” bad, it will be unimaginably bad!
  - NOTE: “utterly destroyed” is NOT “death-sleep”

<sup>24</sup> *"And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days.*

### Peter preaches the AUTHORITY of SCRIPTURE

- A. Again, God's Word is restating that the message of the Messiah (here being shared) is NOT NEW... but the same message of old
- B. NOTE: Samuel was thought to be the next prophet (and last judge) after Moses... thus, in mentioning Samuel by name (after highlighting Moses via quotes) and declaring that ALL the prophets after Samuel shared the same message...
  - The implied point = this message has ALWAYS been God's message!
  - The implied point = Repentance & Faith in Christ has ALWAYS been the way to a righteous relationship with the one true God!

<sup>25</sup> *"It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.'*

### Peter preaches ACCOUNTABILITY

### Peter preaches the GREAT COMMISSION

T/S: Warren Wiersbe offered (5) invaluable insights:

- 1.** True witness involves the "bad news" of sin and guilt as well as the "good news" of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. There can be no true faith in Christ unless first there is repentance from sin. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict lost sinners ([John 16:7-11](#)), and He will do this if we faithfully witness and use God's Word.
- 2.** The way to reach the masses is by helping the individual sinner. Peter and John won the crippled beggar and his transformed life led to the conversion of 2,000 men! The servant of God who has no time for personal work with individual sinners will not be given many opportunities for ministering to great crowds. Like Jesus, the Apostles took time for individuals.
- 3.** The best defense of the truth of the Christian faith is a changed life. The healed beggar was "Exhibit A" in Peter's defense of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his evangelistic ministries, the Methodist preacher Samuel Chadwick used to pray for "a Lazarus" in every campaign, some "great sinner" whose conversion would shock the community. He got the idea from [John 12:9-11](#). God answered his prayers in meeting after meeting as infamous wicked men trusted Christ and became witnesses through their changed lives. Let's go after the "hard cases" and see what God can do!
- 4.** Whenever God blesses, Satan shows up to oppose the work and silence the witness; and often he uses religious people to do his work. The same crowd that opposed the ministry of

Jesus Christ also opposed the work of the Apostles, and they will oppose our ministry today. Expect it—but don't let it stop you! The important thing is not that we are comfortable, but that the name of the Lord is glorified through the preaching of the Gospel.

**5.** God has promised to bless and use His Word, so let's be faithful to witness. Jesus even prayed that our witness would have success ([John 17:20](#)), so we have every reason to be encouraged. There is power in the name of Jesus, so we need not fear to witness and call sinners to repent.

- A. (3) O.T. giants have now been referenced as having endorsed and/or declared this same message (as Peter is declaring)
- Moses – see quote above...
  - Samuel – see v.24
  - Abraham – v.25
- B. “*It is YOU*” ---- Don’t miss this... while God the Father, God the Son, Peter, Moses, Samuel, and now Abraham have all been directly woven into this declaration & proclamation... the force of ALL that has thus far been stated & shared, NOW rests on the shoulders of Peter’s hearers (which includes YOU)
- Peter is coming in for the conviction climax! – JDP
  - Peter is using a cultural “hook”
    - “If you accept the prophets as your own...”
    - “If you accept your forefathers as your own...”
    - “If you accept the old covenant as your own...”
    - “If you accept your blessing as your own...”
    - “If you accept God’s word then, accept it now!”

<sup>26</sup> *"For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."*

Peter closes his sermon with a crescendo verse!

Peter preaches:

LOVE  
ELECTION  
SOVEREIGNTY of GOD  
RESURRECTION  
TRINITY  
CHRISTOLOGY  
GREAT COMMISSION  
GRACE  
MERCY  
HOPE  
REPENTANCE  
SIN  
HELL

*Peter preached THE GOSPEL...*

**...and so should you & I!**

*"Go into all the world & preach the gospel."*

**- Jesus, the Christ**

A. NO EXCUSES!

- Peter now connects God's love and his hearer's accountability!
- While not 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews, we can share in this dynamic in a beautifully personal way:
  - To hear the gospel is to encounter God's grace
  - To hear the gospel is to be without excuse
  - To hear the gospel is to be invited
- *"God raised up His Servant"*
  - See Isaiah 53!
  - See... *"the God of our fathers"* is in this!
  - See... Jesus IS the *"suffering Servant!"*
- *"and sent Him"*
  - Jesus was the first Christian Missionary!
  - Christ-likeness = sent to serve & bless others!
  - Link this passage with John 3:16!
  - Link this passage with Hebrews 12:1-2
- *"to bless you"*
  - God's glory is magnified in His blessings! – JDP
  - God's definition of "bless" is essential to grasp!
    - ~ God's Gospel defines His holy blessing:
    - ~ Jesus is at the heart of the blessing... HE:
      - ! Purchased – the gospel
      - ! Presented – the gospel
      - ! EmPowered – the gospel

B. Black & White "blueprint"

- *"by"* = defining explanation...
  - This word introduces divine clarification
  - This word announces a divine unveiling...
  - This word alerts the reader: Look & Listen!
  - This word destroys all other debatable options
- *"turning every one of you from your wicked ways"*
  - REPENT! (here defined... in application)

- *“every one of you”*
  - ~ Indisputable “macro” directive
  - ~ Indisputable “micro” directive
- *“from your”*
  - ~ Divinely inspired, implied possession
  - ~ Divinely inspired “ownership”
  - ~ The reference that follows belongs to you!
- “wicked ways”
  - ~ “All but God’s ways are wicked ways.” - JDP
  - ~ “Without Jesus, the best human is still on the worst side of a holiness continuum, defined, described, and delineated by the Cross of Christ.” - JDP

### C. Closing “Invitation”

- NOTE: see how Peter left them “feeling”
- NOTE: see how Peter ended his sermon/speech
- NOTE: compare Peter’s with Christ’s preaching
- NOTE: compare Peter’s with cultural preaching

\*\*\* See attached sermon: excellent exegetical resource.

## Why We Don't Use The Altar Call

By Laurence A. Justice

An altar call is an appeal for an immediate public response to a sermon just preached. It is popularly called the invitation and as used in this context is an appeal for a public act of commitment and can involve hand raising, going to a counseling area or signing a commitment card. Most often it involves walking down the aisle to the front of a church auditorium. The altar call is tacked on to the end of a sermon and the invitation usually is to "come forward and accept Christ as your Savior." Various emotional techniques such as telling sad, tear jerking stories and playing mood-creating music in the background are employed to encourage response to the altar call.

Like many of you I grew up in churches which used the invitation system and in the early years of my ministry I used it myself before finally seeing its implications and its inconsistency with God's grace. In those years we sang verse after verse of invitation hymns like "Just As I Am" and we sometimes sang on for an hour or more trying to get people to come forward. I once had an evangelist in a church where I pastored and his entire program consisted of night after night telling sob story after sob story climaxing with the saddest one of all and then giving an invitation to come to the front and accept Christ.

So firmly entrenched has the altar call become in our modern churches that I have had people ask me on several occasions, How can people be saved if you don't give an invitation? Preachers who do not give altar calls are often criticized as not being evangelistic.

We do not have an altar call in the services of our church! We do not extend an invitation at the close of our services for people to make some kind of physical demonstration that they are trusting Christ. What I shall do in this sermon is explain just why we don't! First of all we do not do it

### **Because God's Word Does Not Teach the Altar Call**

It is vitally important in this practice as in all others that we look closely at the scriptures to find what they teach about this practice. As we do we find that the invitation is never commanded in God's word. Search the scriptures as you will, there is no command in any scripture for us to use this method. Not only this, there is no precedent in scripture for using the altar call. The Lord Jesus never in his earthly ministry gave an invitation. The apostles of our Lord never in all their ministries used the altar call.

In Acts 2:36-37 we are told that at Pentecost 3,000 people were saved but no altar call was used. The saving of those 3,000 was the work of the Holy Spirit of God and not of clever emotional appeals to come to the front of the meeting place. Whatever reasons one may give for using the altar call, it is a fact that it cannot be supported from the word of God.

As we have already pointed out, some people believe and teach that if one does not give an invitation in connection with his sermon he is not evangelistic. But we cannot be more evangelistic than the New Testament and the altar call or invitation system is not to be found in the pages of the New Testament. Actually having an altar call is a departure from scriptural requirements and practice.

In the New Testament and in Christian history up until the year 1820 AD sinners were invited to Christ, not to decide at the end of a sermon whether to perform some physical action. You will search Christian history in vain for an altar call or invitation before about 1820. George Whitefield, the greatest evangelist perhaps of all time never used the altar call. Charles Spurgeon under whose preaching more people were saved than perhaps any other pastor over the centuries never gave an invitation.

Well, where did the altar call come from if God's word doesn't teach it? The answer is that the altar call is a human invention that is less than 200 years old.

It is generally recognized that the altar call was invented by a Presbyterian evangelist named Charles G. Finney who lived from 1792-1875. Finney referred to the altar call as coming to the anxious seat or to the inquiry room and began using it in his evangelistic services in about 1820. Did the churches do it all wrong in the matter of evangelism until Finney came along in 1820 with his new system? How were people saved during the 1800 years of Christian history before the advent of Charles G. Finney? Evangelist D.L. Moody took Finney's altar call and refined it and in turn it was passed on to its modern champion, Billy Graham.

In a paper he wrote called "The Christian," Billy Graham defends his use of the invitation system by resorting, not to the scriptures but to psychology when he says concerning the invitation, "Many psychologists would say it is psychologically sound." Biblical practices do not need the endorsement of psychology! There is absolutely no biblical authority for this practice! Yet today virtually all evangelists and pastors and churches use the altar call or invitation system.

Second, our church does not use the altar call or invitation system

## **Because the Altar Call Contradicts the Great Doctrines of God's Grace**

### ***1. It contradicts the Bible doctrine of the depravity or the inability of man.***

God's word teaches that because of the fall of Adam into sin man is by nature spiritually dead. As Paul states it in Ephesians 2:1 man is "dead in trespasses and sins." A man who is spiritually dead can do nothing spiritual. He can't even will to repent of sin and trust in Christ. He is dead!

God's word teaches that because of their depravity men are helpless to save or help save themselves. This means that there is absolutely nothing a sinner can do to save himself or prepare himself for salvation. Spiritually dead sinners can never come to Christ until God calls them with a special, powerful, effectual call. This is what the Lord Jesus is talking about in John 6:44 when He says, "No man **can** come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him..." or literally, No man **is able** or has the power to come to me except the Father draw him."

Charles Finney, the inventor of the altar call, was a Pelagian in theology. Pelagianism is a damnable heresy which teaches that the fall of man in sin did not actually make him dead in sin. It is true man was damaged by the fall but he was not ruined by it this heresy says. Finney's idea was that man is just sick in sin but he still has within him the ability to obey God and be pleasing to Him.

In his book "Systematic Theology" Finney says that man can do anything God requires of him and that all he needs to do so is to be induced to do so. Thus according to Finney man has a free will and has within him the ability to repent and to believe. This thinking of course squarely contradicts the Bible doctrine of man's inability.

## ***2. Secondly the altar call contradicts the biblical order of salvation.***

The whole question of the altar call or invitation can be reduced to the order of salvation. The word of God teaches that in the order of salvation, regeneration precedes conversion. In John 3:3 for example the Lord Jesus says that only those who are born again can see or comprehend or understand or appreciate the kingdom of God or spiritual things. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man **be born again, he cannot see** the kingdom of God." God's word makes clear that the Holy Spirit in the new birth **enables** a sinner to trust in Christ.

Arminians on the other hand say that one must believe or be converted **in order to be regenerated**. In his great booklet "The Invitation System" Iain Murray quotes Billy Graham as saying that we are "made alive by trust in Christ." This of course is just the opposite of what God's word teaches about the order of salvation being regeneration and then faith and conversion.

In the same booklet Murray quotes Graham concerning Graham's own conversion. "They were singing the last verse of the song when I went forward. That first step was the hardest I ever took in my life. But when I took it, God did the rest" and "the rest" in Graham's thinking is the new

birth! In this way of thinking poor God can't do anything for a sinner until the sinner takes the first step!

If, as God's word clearly teaches, regeneration must come **before** conversion in the order of salvation then the invitation system must be given up as contradictory to God's word!

### **3. Thirdly, the altar call contradicts the gospel way of salvation by coming to Christ.**

The gospel **is not**, do something physical and if you will, you will be saved! The gospel is, **Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved!" The duty of sinners is not to come to the front of the building but to believe in Christ! To be saved sinners must come to Christ which means believe in Christ.

The Lord Jesus Himself says in Matthew 11:28, "**Come unto me**, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Think about it! No one can now come to Christ with his feet because Christ is no longer physically present on this earth. Christ is not down here at the front of this church auditorium anymore than he is back there in the pew or outside in the parking lot or out on your back porch. As someone else has said, the fountain of life is not in front of the pulpit in some church building. The fountain of life is Christ Himself!

We don't have to move a muscle to totally commit ourselves to the safe keeping of Christ the Savior for salvation. The altar call implies at least and it is often specifically stated that by coming to the front of a church building or some other auditorium at some preacher's invitation, the one who comes becomes a Christian.

To those who practice the altar call salvation is equated with getting people to occupy a certain piece of geography at the front of a building. In doing this they effectively limit the sphere of God's saving activity to a few square feet at the front of some building. My friend John Hunter of Anniston, Alabama calls this **locational salvation** because it makes the front of the church auditorium the location where people must go to be saved.

At Billy Graham's first London Crusade he said one night in giving the invitation, "Don't let distance keep you from Christ. It's a long way but Christ went all the way to the cross because he loved you. Certainly you can come these few steps and give your life to Him." God's word however does

not teach that one is saved by changing his location but by believing in his heart!

**4. Fourthly, the altar call contradicts the Bible doctrine of salvation by grace without works.**

Biblical salvation is not of works. It is not by doing something, anything at all. Instead it is by grace through faith according to Ephesians 2:8-9. "For **by grace** are ye saved **through faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is **the gift of God: Not of works**, lest any man should boast." Faith itself is the gift of God and not the accomplishment or contribution of man to salvation. Colossians 2:12 calls faith "the operation of God" and Philippians 1:29 calls it a gift given. "For unto you it is **given...to believe** on him..."

Under the invitation system the idea constantly presented by the preacher is that the step forward is of great spiritual importance. Faith is presented as something a

man does in order to be saved. Believing in Christ is identified with coming to the front of the church building in response to the preacher's appeal. But making an outward response the same thing as receiving Christ adds a condition of salvation that Christ Jesus never appointed. Works is the necessary **evidence of** salvation, **not** the **prior condition** of it. The altar call satisfies man's natural desire to do something to save or help save himself.

**5. Fifth, it contradicts the Bible doctrine of Sola Scriptura.**

Sola Scriptura means the scriptures only and it recognizes that God's written word gives us **everything** we need for all matters of faith and practice. There is nothing God wants us to know or to do that is not found in His written word. According to II Timothy 3:16-17 God's word is sufficient or completely adequate for all our spiritual needs. The altar call is a way of promoting religious experience by other means than those clearly appointed in God's word so it is a denial of Sola Scriptura and of the sufficiency of God's word.

The third reason our church does not use the altar call is

**Because It Does Great Damage to the Cause of Christ**

What have been the results of 200 years of using this unbiblical method called the altar call or the invitation? I submit to you that the results of the use of the altar call have been disastrous! There are at least three things that the invitation system does that cause great damage to the cause of Christ:

**1. It produces great numbers of obviously false professions of Christ.**

I say **obviously false** because so many converts of this system refuse to do the very first thing that Christ the Lord demands of his people and that is submit to scriptural baptism. There is a vast difference in the number claiming to be saved and the number actually baptized in this type of evangelism.

The other day I came across some statistics put out by Jim Elliff, a professor at Southern Baptists' Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here in Kansas City. By their own statistics Elliff says that among Southern Baptists out of every 100 professions of faith only 30 are later baptized and out of that 30 only 10 will show up at church on a given Sunday morning and of that 30 only 4 will show up on a given Sunday evening.

One well known altar call evangelist held a revival meeting in Oklahoma City in which 47 people professed to have been saved. A few weeks after that meeting I called the pastor of that church and asked him how many of those 47 he had baptized and he said, Three!

**2. A second thing the altar call does which causes great damage to Christ's cause is it fatally deceives many who respond to it.**

Walking the aisle and giving the pastor one's hand often gives people doing so a false hope of salvation. These people believe that they are spiritually right with God simply because they have made the required step down the aisle though they have never truly come to Christ in faith trusting in Him as Lord and Savior. On any number of occasions I have asked people, when were you saved? only to have them respond, I went forward when I was 18 or when I was a child or at some other time.

Large numbers of those who have come into the churches with such counterfeit conversions have stayed there as formal, dead and deceived professors. I have known some such persons who have been awakened after years of such deception to realize that in their trips to the altar they did not come **to Christ!** How many people are in hell today per this deception?

***3. Thirdly, the altar call causes much damage to the cause of Christ because it produces skepticism and bitterness in many who respond to it.***

Many people who have sincerely and honestly gone through the invitation system have recognized that nothing actually happened to them. They tried it and it didn't work and they know it is not real. They may also think that others who have tried it know that it doesn't work and that they just don't have the honesty to admit it to themselves. If their own experience is not real it is just natural for them to conclude that the experiences of others are false also.

Many converts of the invitation system feel that they have been tricked by the evangelist and their Christian friends into making such a move down the aisle. Ultimately this has produced skepticism and hostility toward the gospel and because of this realization many have fallen away from Christianity altogether.

In another city where I was pastor our church decided to knock on every door in our neighborhood and ask people if they were Christians. I was amazed to find that virtually all people responded that they were or used to be Christians but either were no longer so or did not now go to church. They all claimed to have been saved in some crusade or revival service.

Such results of the altar call can be seen in the two Southern Baptist churches I pastored in Oklahoma City. One had over 600 members, 300 of whom we could not find. The other had over 900 members, 750 of whom we could not find.

In his day Charles Spurgeon commented on the damage done to the cause of Christ by the use of the altar call. Iain Murray in his book "The Forgotten Spurgeon" quotes Spurgeon as saying, "I should like to go to the inquiry room. I dare say you would, but we are not willing to pander to popular superstition. We fear that in those rooms men are warmed into a fictitious confidence. Very few of the supposed converts of inquiry rooms turn out well. Go to your God at once, even where you are now. Cast yourself on Christ, at once, ere you stir an inch!"

## **Conclusion**

Why do the churches keep on using this unscriptural practice of giving an altar call?

1. For one reason they fail to measure all things by God's word. All of us have a tendency to accept things as being right without comparing them with God's word to find out if they really are.

2. Another reason is the desire on the parts of many pastors and churches to report numbers because they see numbers as equal to success in the church. Counting large numbers of converts is irresistible to these pragmatists. Some of them don't care if the invitation cannot be found in God's word. It works and they say that is what is important in God's work.

3. Thirdly the use of the altar call in a church indicates a failure to trust God to do His work in this world. These people do not really believe that God can do His saving work in this world without the wisdom and methods of man to help.

But how are people to be saved if we do not "give an invitation" at the close of the sermon? **Christ's** invitation is found in Matthew 11:28 where he says to sinners, **not**, Come to the front of the church but "**Come unto me** all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

If we are to be true to God's word we must direct sinners to Christ and not to the aisles in the church building. The messages of God's preachers are filled with invitations for all men everywhere to come to Christ and be saved. We must be careful not to give the impression that a sinner's eternal destiny hangs on the movement of his feet. Let us determine to stay with biblical methods of evangelism and plant, water and trust God for the increase in seeking the salvation of souls.

### **Recommended Reading**

Adams, James E. *Decisional Regeneration*

Chantry, Walter *Today's Gospel, Authentic Or Synthetic?*

Dabney, Robert L. *An Exposition Of I Corinthians 3:10-15*

Murray, Iain *The Invitation System*