

EASY TO BE SAVED, HARD TO BE LOST

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David was into his third marriage. In the first marriage his wife had been unfaithful. The second was an alcoholic. And now his third marriage was to one who was much more the homemaker and responsible one.

David had it all so far as the business world was concerned. He traveled the world. He made deals. He did consulting. But in his social life he was never satisfied with the one at home. Discontent caused him to cast an eye elsewhere after several years of marriage. For a while he was able to keep the affair secret until his wife discovered e-mail messages from the other woman. Then the argument ensued and David separated and filed for divorce.

Old friends and family were cut off in order to pursue his own inner desires. He knew what others would have to say to him so he just didn't want to hear it. He was on his own quest for happiness.

David's story is reflected in the lives of millions who are seeking fulfillment and inner peace. Success is just out there. Romance is to be found in the next relationship. In the end romance and peace are as elusive as playing hide-and-seek.

What is the secret to inner peace and happiness? Popular psychology perpetuates the idea that the strength to change comes from within. This caters to the ego of man that he has the resources to solve his dilemmas. But repeated failures bring disillusionment and frustration. Oh who can deliver us from ourselves?

Furthermore, conventional wisdom teaches that turning to God for help is so hard and self-denying. Men and women cannot quit repeating their mistakes. God's grace cannot overcome man's defects.

In one of his stories of the early West, Mark Twain tells of the old-time preachers who told the people of "what a beautiful place heaven is and how nearly impossible it is to get there, and . . . what a dreary place hell is, and how easy it is to get there."¹

Like Mark Twain most people believe that it's much easier to be lost than saved. Why to be saved you have to give up so much fun

¹ *Mark Twain Tonight*, p. 118.

stuff? You have to work hard to be a Christian. It takes a lot of discipline and stern battles with self. Someone says, "I'm just not cut out for that kind of stuff. I like to party and have a good time. Why would I want to get saddled down with such a boring thing as becoming a Christian?"

This may shock you, but listen to what Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30.

There are two yokes. Our yoke is indeed heavy and a burden of sin which will sink us into perdition if not lost at the foot of the cross. Jesus said, "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest." Why carry a heavy burden when Jesus freely offers to carry it for you? In exchange He will give His own burden, which is light. The "yoke of bondage" is a galling yoke. From this Christ will set all free who will come to Him. He says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." John 8:36.

A yoke implies service. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." Working yoked up with Him, we work with Him, and He works in us. His works were all done by the word of God. If we, like Him give heed to every word of God, we shall do the works, and find the rest.

Saul of Tarsus was the Inquisitor of the early Christian church. We read: "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Acts 26:13-15.

We see that Saul had not been at peace with his own mind, while persecuting the church of Christ, He had been pricked in his conscience. He had been under conviction that the doctrine he was seeking to root out was the truth, yet old prejudices derived from the instruction of the priests and doctors of the law, which had been his life-study would not yield, and so time after time he had sought to banish these convictions by renewed zeal in persecution. In these efforts he was sincere, for he could not think that the priests and rulers and learned doctors were all wrong, and the despised sect of

Nazarenes were in the right; therefore he strove against the prickings of conscience as against the whisperings of Satan.

Just as Saul was unconsciously persecuting the Lord, even so the Lord, without his recognizing the fact, was patiently giving him instruction all the time. The expression, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," is an allusion to the way in which oxen were driven with a sharp goad. A stubborn ox would sometimes kick against the goad, but this only made his case the worse.

In the Hebrew language the word for "ox goad" is derived from a word meaning "to teach." It was with a sharp goad that the oxen were reminded of their duty, and taught the way they should go. Even so by the sharp conviction of the Holy Spirit, the Lord was seeking to teach Saul the right way, while Saul was stubbornly resisting. The Lord was pricking Saul's conscience to awaken him. The Holy Spirit was making it hard on Saul to destroy himself. The emotional conflict Saul had over this was agonizing. Had he stubbornly resisted, it would have resulted in severe depression and mental breakdown. It was much easier for him to yield to the Holy Spirit's power rather than destroy himself.

We have convinced ourselves that our temptations to sin are the most powerful force in the world. They cannot be overcome. Sometimes we even justify this by using Scripture. For instance, we quote, "If you are guided by the Spirit you will not fulfill the desires of your lower nature. That nature sets its desires against the Spirit, while the Spirit fights against it. They are in conflict with one another so that what you will to do you cannot do." Galatians 5:16, 17, NEB.

Most Christians are convinced that the evil in their lower nature is stronger than the good things the Holy Spirit wants them to do. But the good news of the text is that the Holy Spirit is more powerful than your lower nature. He breaks the tyranny of the flesh. Indeed, there is a severe conflict between the lower nature and the Spirit. "If you are guided by the Spirit you will not fulfill the desires." "What you will to do you cannot do."

This is good news especially for young Christians, as well as older ones. The party scene is very attractive because youth want to be in with their crowd. They want to be popular and so they will take up the dare of their peers by drinking, doing drugs, and giving in to inducements to sex. This is a very self-defeating cycle to get into. It leads to severe self-esteem issues and depression. Will power is futile. It caves in every time to pressure.

But here's the good news. The Holy Spirit is the one that does the striving against sin. He is the one in conflict with evil. He is on guard 24-7, to resist on your behalf, the forces of evil. And which one is more powerful; your flesh or the Spirit? It has to be God's Spirit!

But, some one says, the allurements of sin and the methods of its accessibility are so much more intense today than they were in ancient times. Surely God did not anticipate the small screen, the internet, the corner video store, the telephone, magazines, the gaming industry, State lotteries, etc.

But God's promise is, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness." Romans 5:20, 21. Let every soul who is weary of the burden of sin, and groaning for deliverance from its accursed power, rejoice, for where the sin abounds, even in his heart and life, grace is as much more present, as Christ is stronger than evil. The greater the sin, the greater the saving grace bestowed.

God's power is so great that He makes the devil himself serve Him. He takes the wrath of man, and makes it praise Him. He takes the wrath of man, and binds it about Him, girds Himself with it, and is victorious even by means of it. He takes the evil passions of man, and makes them serve out His purpose.

Do you not know He did it with Joseph? His brethren were moved with envy, and sold him into Egypt; but it was God who sent him there. So Herod, and Pontius Pilate, and the rulers of Jerusalem, stood up against the Lord and against Christ. What for?—To do all that He had appointed to be done. They were not serving the Lord intentionally, but although they conspired against the Lord, to do Satan's utmost will; nevertheless, God's will was worked out. God can work in spite of the devil. More than this, since the wrath of man and devils praise God; every effort against the truth only makes the power of God more striking.

"Can any man live a sinless life?" we have been asked.—No, but Christ can. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Galatians 2:20. I have demonstrated that I can do nothing. The wages of sin is death, and so I must die, and let the Lord take the management. The first man showed his impatience, and now the second Adam comes in, and in Him God's power is fully revealed. There is only one man, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. By the obedience of One many are made righteous. We become men indeed, perfect men, women and children, only as we are in Him.

All of our promises and New Year's resolutions are like ropes of sand. So what alone can move us off dead center? "The love of Christ [*agape*] constraineth [motivates] us." 2 Corinthians 5:14. Christ's love pushes us. He doesn't overpower our will, but He supplies all the motivation short of that.

In my hiking days I would go for miles with a forty pound pack on my back. A day's hike would often involve twelve miles with an elevation gain of six to seven thousand feet. That takes its toll on the body and wipes out the energy. There were times when I would lay down in the grass and just fall asleep exhausted. I couldn't go another step.

And that's the way so many feel about the Christian life when they experience defeat after defeat. There is no love of Christ pushing them. It actually takes some power in the tank to get up and go. The hiker's secret is the power bar. Although they are the nastiest tasting things, if you eat one of those you will have strength and energy to continue on for hours.

And that is what understanding the cross of Christ is for us, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15. He has tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9), and in that He died for all, all are dead. 2 Cor. 5:14. His life is the life of all creatures, so that "now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Heb. 9:26. All men are reconciled to God by the death of Christ (Rom. 5:9, 10), for "God was in Christ, reconciling the *world* unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." 2 Cor. 5:19. This being so, whoever truly acknowledges, and abides in the same confession, that he is crucified with Christ, and that he lives only as Christ lives in Him, must be as free from sin as Christ Himself.

"The love of Christ constraineth us," said the apostle. Such was the Apostle Paul, as he frequently testifies in his epistles. He was taken prisoner on his way to Damascus, where he was about to make prisoners of those who believed in the Lord. The Lord frequently arrests people in their career of sin, to bring them for a moment to a realization of their own helplessness, in order that they may see where they stand, and have a favorable opportunity to choose the way of life.

But the Lord never keeps anyone a prisoner against his will. His prison is not a dungeon; for the Lord does not need to shut a person up in order to have possession of him. Nor are His bonds such as those which confine men kept in custody by the powers of earth. They are bonds which do not in any wise interfere with the captive's liberty. They do not hold him in one place, but draw him about, even in the most remotest parts of the earth.

"The love of Christ constraineth us," said the apostle; and this is the bond which holds every prisoner of the Lord. The Lord desires and seeks to bind every person to Himself by the cords of love. Such bondage could never make any person sad, for love is the only thing in the world that can make one happy; and being bound to Him, He is in the same bondage that we are in. Happy is that person who, when the Lord arrests him, is willing to continue His prisoner. Let the Christian meditate on the wonderful love of Christ, and the sacrifice made by Him to save and bless lost, ruined sinners, until the fire burns in his heart, and he can say in sincerity and truth, "The love of Christ constraineth us." Then we shall find it sweet to feel that we are near to God.

How often we have thought that we are the ones who have to turn to God in order for Him to receive us. Little did we realize that it is God's gift of repentance that causes our change of mind toward Him. "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Romans 2:4. Repentance means a change of your mind about God. It is God's goodness that leads you to repentance.

Do you think that God has done His part by sending Jesus to die and has made the *provision* for everyone to be saved if you will try hard enough,—through Bible study, prayer, witnessing,—to reach Jesus? Is God standing back with His arms crossed to see if you have what it takes? Rather, it is God's love that draws you with His cords of love.

Consider how surprised a woman was one Sabbath morning when her non-Christian husband came downstairs all dressed up to go to church. She had been praying for years that he would be converted.

Her first words to him were, "But, honey, if you don't go to work this morning, what will happen to your job? How will the mortgage be paid?"

With that he wheeled right around on his heels and headed back upstairs to get ready for work. He never said a word again about going to church.

Sometimes we thwart the constraining love of God without realizing it. If we would stand back and get out of the way, God could do so much more in our lives and in the ones that we love. If we do not hinder God's love, we will be saved. Let us cherish every ray of light He brings our way by saying, "Yes" to it.

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, let us hold fast our profession," or "confession." What is this "confession of faith," to which we are exhorted to hold fast? A confession is simply an acknowledgment of the truth. The great truth—the Gospel of great joy—for all people, is that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." 1 John 4:2. Whoever makes that confession is of God. God's living and active Word pierces every fiber of our being. Of Christ, the Word, we read: "The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the Word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Romans 10:8, 9.

"The Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart." For what purpose is it so near?—"That thou mayest do it." Deut. 30:14. The living Word is therefore in the mouth and heart of the sinner, in order that he may do it. So near has God brought His saving grace to all mankind. "He is not far from every one of us." No; He is very near, even in our very hearts and mouths, "a very present help in trouble." Psalm 46:1.

Lest any should think that this cannot be true of sinners, we will call attention to the following facts in connection with the Scriptures. No one first makes a thing true by confessing it; it does not become a fact because he confesses it, but he confesses it because it is already a fact. Therefore the confession of Christ is but the acknowledgment of the already existing fact, that He "is come in the flesh." The Word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart—in thy flesh; confess this fact, and "thou shalt be saved." This teaches the presence of Christ in every soul, waiting for recognition, in order that He may save.

Some one may say, "Then you would make no difference between a sinner and a Christian?"—Oh, yes, indeed; all the difference in the world, or, rather, all the difference between the world

and heaven. Christ has come in the flesh,—that is in all mankind, for man is flesh (Gen. 7:3),—but while He dwells in the sinner without recognition, and is held down in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:15), in the Christian He dwells “*by faith*.” Eph. 3:19. The difference between the impenitent sinner and the Christian is the difference between a man who uses the gift of God without any recognition of the Giver, arrogating to himself God’s power, and a man who acknowledges that the Lord is his strength, and who yields all to His control.

Take any sinner; let him acknowledge the truth that is evident to everyone, that he does not live by his own power, but that Christ is the only vital force, and let him live in constant recognition of that fact, and he will at once and for ever be a Christian, for he will necessarily allow Christ to have His own way, living His own life in full. This is how easy has God made the way of salvation; simply a constant giving up of self to the control of the power that keeps us alive.

What a glorious Gospel this is to every poor sinner! And what a glorious thing to be permitted to proclaim it! Think of the joy of being able to assure the most debased soul that the fact that he still lives is evidence that there is salvation for him, if he desires salvation, and will yield to the power that keeps him alive. He who is our High Priest on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, is also by the Spirit present in the flesh, with all power in heaven and on earth over all flesh. John 17:2. Confess this truth, and you have the victory over the world. 1 John 5:4, 5.

This is the only confession of faith. Men may recite creeds until they are grey, and be no better for it, for you cannot put Christ on paper. The confession of faith is not a dogma, nor a formula of belief that can be recited in concert by a class of boys. The true confession of faith—the confession of Christ—is the recognition and acknowledgment of the living truth that Christ dwells personally by the Spirit in the one making the confession.

Each one must make it for himself, as the result of personal conviction, in words coming from the fullness of his heart, and not dictated to him by another; and not only in words but in action, for the indwelling Word is living and active. The true confession of faith is therefore not a thing for a single hour, but of a lifetime, for it is the Christian life.

Maybe you think this is too much good news and think that the following Scripture contradicts everything that has been said: “Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that

leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Matthew 7:13, 14. If we properly understand what Jesus is saying, this is good news too.

On one particular climb that my daughter and I went on, we were carrying backpacks. We came to a narrow ledge with big exposure to an open-faced cliff below. She was very afraid. So I encouraged her by saying, “Take off your backpack and cross over without any burden on your back.” She said that she could do that. She easily passed the narrow ledge while I followed her up carrying the pack.

To enter the strait gate and narrow way that leads to life, Jesus bids us to drop our load of sin. We are carrying baggage that will throw us off balance as we walk the pathway with Him. It is a fight to say, “No,” to our self and its pleasures. But the overcoming victory belongs to Jesus, and it is not done in our own strength. It is impossible for you to deny yourself, but Jesus can do it in you.

Here is the conclusion of one Christian writer regarding this matter of it being hard to be lost. “The way of transgressors is hard.” Proverbs 13:15. “Yet do not therefore conclude that the upward path is the hard and the downward road the easy way. All along the road that leads to death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God’s love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to destroy themselves.”²

Thank God, it is a million times easier for us to be crucified with Christ, than it was for Him to be crucified alone for us! Behold the Lamb of God, and it does indeed become easy:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.³

² Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, p. 139.

³ Isaac Watts