“Accepting Christ”

by I. C. Herendeen

In an effort to get sinners saved we often hear them exhorted to “accept Christ as their personal Saviour” as though those who are slaves of Satan and captives of the Devil could do so and be saved if they did so. But this is utterly foreign to Holy Scripture; there is no foundation in Holy Writ for it. It presents a false way of salvation, and therefore should be discarded along with other similar expressions such as “Give your heart to Jesus,” “Take Jesus as your Saviour,” etc. Such expressions fail to take into consideration the plain and sad fact that man is a fallen creature (Rom 3:23), “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4: 18) with a heart stubbornly steeled against Him so that he “will not” come to Christ (John 5:40) unless and until Divine power overcomes his innate enmity and makes him willing to come that he “might have life” (John 10:10). By nature the sinner’s “carnal mind” is “enmity against God” (Romans 8:7) so that naught but Divine power operating within him can overcome this enmity. The salvation of any sinner is a matter of “the operation of God” (Colossians 2:12).

A spiritual kingdom requires a spiritual nature, and in order to acquire that, the natural man must be regenerated, Divinely regenerated, for the creature can no more quicken himself [make himself come to life] than he can give himself a natural being, Why not? Because regeneration is no mere outward reformation, process of education, or even religious cultivation. No, it consists of a **supernatural** radical change of heart and transformation of character, the communication of a gracious and holy principle, producing new desires, new capacities, *a new life*. **The new birth is absolutely imperative, but this is the work of the Spirit of God** from the very nature of the case. Birth altogether excludes the idea of any effort or work on the part of the one born, hence it is written in Scripture: “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63).

The new birth is much, very much more than temporary remorse for sin, giving mental assent to the acceptance of Christ as personal Saviour, changing the course of life, or leaving off bad habits and substituting good ones. “It goes infinitely deeper than that – it is the inception and reception of a new life. It is radical, revolutionary, lasting, a *miracle*, the result of the supernatural operation of God.” “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9), of Lord from beginning to end.

It is no marvel that the natural man needs to be born again, for he is totally depraved, a slave of sin and Satan, devoid of any love to God, any relish for heavenly things, and any ability to perform spiritual acts.” The sinner has been totally “ruined by the fall,” is “without strength” (Romans 5:6), hence it is written in John 6:44 “No man can come to Me, *except* the Father which has sent Me *draw* him.” Only those who have been “*made* meet to be partakers of it a inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12) and made holy shall enter heaven which is a “prepared place” for a prepared people (John 14:2).

“Without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14; Matt 5:8). “By his apostasy man lost his holiness, is wholly corrupt and under the dominion of dispositions and lusts which are directly contrary to God. The corruption of man’s being is so great and entire that he will never truly repent unless and until he is supernaturally renewed by the Holy Spirit. In order for any to have Christ as their Saviour they must first have received Him is their ‘Lord’ (Col 2:6; Acts 2:36), as their King to rule over them, for God saves none in their rebellion against him.” We must cease our rebellion against Him and His authority and give Him the throne of our hearts as our Ruler or He is not our Saviour no matter what our profession.

It seems to be the understanding of so many that if and when Christ is “offered” to man for his acceptance and he “surrenders” and he “gives his heart to Jesus” that the blood of Christ will then avail to wash away his sins. But not so. You could just as well offer food to a corpse, for Ephesians 2:1-2 tells us that sinners are “dead in trespasses and sins,” and certainly a “dead” man cannot “accept Christ” or cooperate with the of God. It is a sad delusion indeed that any should think that it lies it the power of the natural man to perform any act of what is naively termed “simple faith” and thus be saved. The truth of the Word of God is that before any man can be saved he must be “born of the Spirit” of God (John 3:8) and surrender to the authority of God else his profession is worthless and his religion vain.

To exhort sinners to be saved by “Accepting Christ as their Saviour” without pressing upon them the imperative necessity of **repentance** is dishonest, and is to falsify God’s terms of salvation, for “*Except* ye repent ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 17:3) is the Divine dictum. The sinner must either repent or perish, there is no other alternative. And since “All have sinned” (Rom 3:23) all therefore need to “repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15) else they will be “punished with ever lasting destruction” (2 Thes 1:9). To delay repentance then is most perilous.

“Repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18) is “not of a work of nature but a gracious work of the Spirit of God, begun in the heart and manifested in the new birth, continued throughout the entire life of the Christian, and consummated in Heaven.”

“Accepting Christ as personal Savior” is a far, far cry, from that repentance that God demands from the sinner before he can be saved (see Acts 17:30). For salvation, “repentance unto life” is just as necessary as is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. No sinner was ever pardoned while he remained impenitent, while he remained in rebellion against God and His authority, and without submitting himself wholeheartedly to His Lordship. This involves the realization in his heart, wrought therein by the Holy Spirit, of “the sinfulness of sin” (Rom 7:13), of the awfulness of ignoring the claims of God and of defying His Authority.
Repentance is a “holy horror and hatred of sin, a deep sorrow for it, a contrite acknowledgment of it before God, and a complete heart forsaking of it.” Peter in Acts 3:19 did not say that all you have to do is to “Accept Christ” as your

personal Saviour, but instead he said "*Repent* ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

From the above it is crystal clear that a mental assent to the Gospel will save no one, nor will a mere empty profession of faith in Christ. So many flatter themselves that they are born again because they have been baptized, joined some "church of their choice," received the Lord's supper, who do not have a keen and humbling sense of sin. Professing to be Christians, they are filled with a vain and presumptuous confidence that all is well with their souls, deluding themselves with hopes of mercy while continuing to live in a course of self-will and self-pleasing, But "the spiritual impotency of the natural man is total and entire, irreparable and irremediable so far as all human efforts are concerned. Fallen man is utterly indisposed and disabled, thoroughly opposed to God and His law, wholly inclined to evil."

The sinner in his natural state has no power in himself to accept Christ as his personal Saviour, or to "believe to the saving of his soul," nor has he any real desire or intention of doing so for the reason that, as stated above, his "carnal mind" is "enmity against God" (Rom 8:7). He is "the servant {lit. bondslave} of sin" (Rom 6:20) and must be made free from sin" (Rom 6:22) by the almighty "power of God" (Luke 9:43). That he is utterly helpless to save himself is clearly brought out in Jeremiah 13:23 where we read "*Can* the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" When he can do that then "may he also do good, that is accustomed to do evil." The sinner's "spiritual impotency consists in nothing but the depravity of his own heart, and his inveterate hatred of God. He is so helpless and hopeless in himself that he cannot take one step toward Christ for salvation." Hence he is cast upon God "from the womb" (Psalm 22:10) if ever he is to be saved, so to intimate to sinners that they can come to Christ whenever they agree to accept Christ as their personal Saviour is to deceive and bolster them up on a false "way of salvation." This is an exceedingly serious matter. They need to "seek the Lord while He is to be found, and call upon Him while He is near" (Isa 55:6).

How we do need to be reminded of the scriptural injunction to "Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13), and present the Gospel as far as possible in "words which the Holy Ghost teacheth" and not in "words which man's wisdom teacheth" (1 Cor 2:13). Selah.

As another has so well said, "The saving work of Christ, that is, the saving of a soul from hell, is only *one* of His many offices and works that the Saviour does for men. If you heard the preacher say at the wedding, 'George, do you take Margaret whom you hold by the hand as your lawful wedded cook?' you would sit up in astonishment and wonder at what kind of a marriage is taking place. No preacher calls attention to the work, or the ability, or the service which the bride will bring to her husband. In fact, the husband takes the wife for everything that she can do, and all that she is."

Yet in preaching the Gospel we call attention to *one work* of the Saviour

instead of to the *Person Himself* who does that wonderful work. Let us see how the Scripture reads. Do we find in John 1:12, "But as many as received Him, *as their Saviour*, to them gave He power to become the sons of God"? No, the words "as their Saviour" are not found in the verse. Do we read in John 3:16, "that whosoever believeth in Him *as his own personal, Saviour*"? No, we do not. These words are not found in the verse. Nor are they found in 1 John 5:12, Matthew 11:28, etc. In fact, the expression *never* occurs, for the Holy Spirit does not attract the sinner's attention to one particular work, but always to the wonderful and precious Person who did, and who does the work.

"It is as at the wedding, the bride who married the rich man confesses that she is his bride, his wife. She does not say I took him as my banker, or as my companion, or as anything else. My experience has been through the years that those who profess to be saved through that kind of phraseology that is not found in the Bible quite often cannot be found after a few weeks or months" (Dr. W. L. Wilson in the Defender).

Pink says that "Man, with his invariable perversity, has reversed God's order. Modern evangelism urges giddy worldlings, with no sense of their lost condition, to 'Accept Christ as their personal Saviour,' and when such converts prove unsatisfactory to the churches special meetings are arranged where they are pressed to 'consecrate themselves' to Christ as Lord"!

How we do need to "Prove all things" and "hold fast it at which is good" (1 Thes 5:21).