

Altar Calls

“We have an altar” Hebrews 13:10

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A pastor wrote to me recently asking about altar calls (the common practice of inviting sinners to walk down to the front of an auditorium, or other makeshift “altar”, at the end of a religious service to receive Christ). He said, “Pastor I would be interested in how you deal with the matter of altar calls at your church. It is a matter that I have been struggling with. I have seen its abuse in the past with the (denomination) I was licensed under and I have not found peace yet concerning this area. I feel like I should do something, but not the way I was taught, because there was too much manipulation emotionally with the people.” We do not give “altar” calls at the end of our services for a number of reasons.

1. Christ is our altar.

We do not worship at any earthly, material altar. No sinner has ever been saved by walking down a church aisle, kneeling at a wooden bench, and saying a scripted prayer. If we would obtain mercy and grace from God, we must do business with the God-man Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, in our hearts. In most Baptist churches, the *altar* serves exactly the same purpose as the confessional booth among papists. It is a place to which men come to meet another man who, acting as a priest (2 Thes. 2:4), pronounces their sins absolved and assures them that they now have a ticket to heaven.

2. We have neither precept nor precedence for the practice in the New Testament.

Not once is there an example of Christ, any of the apostles, or any preacher in the New Testament urging sinners to say anything, sign anything, do

anything, or walk anywhere for salvation. The practice of altar calls, signing decision cards, saying scripted prayers, etc., are matters of idolatrous, human invention, without a shred of biblical foundation. Salvation is by grace alone in Christ alone. It is obtained by faith alone.

3. Believers confess their faith in Christ, not by going to an altar, but by believer's baptism.

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By our immersion, we symbolically confess our salvation through the sin-atoning death of Christ our Substitute, like our Master, symbolically fulfilling all righteousness (Rom. 6:4-6; Matt. 3:15). Baptism pictures the washing away of our sins by the blood of Christ, and our resurrection from the dead by the power of his grace, through the virtue of his sacrifice as our substitute.

4. We do not depend upon psychological manipulation for the conversion of sinners, but upon the irresistible power and grace of God the Holy Spirit.

It is our business to preach the gospel of Christ, to tell sinners the truth, to deliver God's message of redemption accomplished by Christ (Isa. 40:1-2). We must do that, and absolutely nothing more. We do not beg helpless sinners to let God save them. We beg almighty God to accompany the Word preached, drive it home to chosen, redeemed sinners, giving them life and faith in Christ for the glory of his name. Our concern is not with results, but with honoring God. We leave the results in his hand (2 Cor. 14-17).

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