

# **The Rest of the Old, Old Story The Sure Foundation of God**

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## **The Sure Foundation of God**

*The foundation of God stands firm, having this inscription: The Lord knows those that are his, and let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

How many other inscriptions have we written on the foundation of God other than the one the Scripture gives? Have we ever considered this verse and the importance of it?

In this booklet, we will address the following issues:

- There is only one foundation.
- The two parts of the foundation.
  1. The Lord knows those who are his
  2. Departing from iniquity
- Why departing from iniquity is the only true sound doctrine
- This foundation is the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection

## **Only One Foundation**

Modern, born-again Christians have grown so used to division that it doesn't bother us anymore. We no longer flinch at the idea that we have to tell new Christians to go to the church of their choice, or that we have to encourage them to find a "Bible-believing" church.

It bothers God.

In Galatians 5:19-21, the apostle Paul tells us that there is a work of the flesh, variously translated as heresy, sect, or division, that will keep us out of the kingdom of heaven. That word is the rough equivalent of "denomination."

The word is *hairesis*, and it is used five times in the Book of Acts of various sects of Judaism, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. It's used one time of Christianity itself, mentioning the "sect" known as "the Way."

The Pharisees, Sadducees, and even early Christianity would have been considered denominations of Judaism in the 1st century.

Paul tells us that those who practice denominations won't inherit the kingdom of heaven.

It seems to me that if it's important enough to God to keep people out of the kingdom of heaven, then it's worth us taking a close look at what we're doing. Wouldn't you agree?

### **God's Call to Unity**

We can find dozens of commands to maintain unity. Ephesians 4:3, for example, calls us to "give all diligence" to maintaining unity. Philippians 1:27 through 2:4 provides one of the more poetic and pleasing calls to unity in the New Testament.

Perhaps the most telling testimony to the importance of unity comes from our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jesus chose to devote his very last prayer prior to going to the garden and the cross to our unity. I've heard it called his "high priestly prayer," and his cry for unity is thorough:

Father, I pray not for these alone but also for those who shall believe through their word, that they may be one, even as you and I are one, that they may be one in us, so that the world may know that you sent me. qqq etc. qqq

This prayer helps make it clear *why* unity is so important. Jesus says that our unity is tied to his testimony to the world. The world will believe that the Father sent the Son *if we're united* .

The prayer makes it clear that unity is important, but let's not miss what it says about what unity *is*.

Unity is not just attending the same church. Unity is not sharing a few meetings or listening to the same sermons. Unity is not just agreeing on some important doctrines.

Unity is our being as one with one another as the Father is with the Son.

The unity of the Godhead is not a minor unity.

## **Unity based on what? A Foundation with an Inscription**

On what is this unity based?

Our Scripture talks about a foundation of God and the inscription that is written on it. We know that the foundation on which the church is built is Christ. Now, as we look at 2 Tim. 2:19, we know as well what the inscription of the foundation is.

*The Lord knows those who are his.*

and

*Let those who name the name of Christ depart from iniquity*

Is this foundation really sufficient for the unity of the church? I would like to argue that it is and that it is *easy* to show from Scripture. In fact, once you see it, it leaps out at you from Scripture. That argument, however, will have to wait for the following chapters.

In this chapter, we need to look at what the foundation is.

### **The Lord Knows Those Who Are His.**

We are all prone to trying to discern who belongs to the Lord and who does not. Is this person saved, or is that person saved, we wonder.

These things are in the Lord's hand, not ours. Paul says:

Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or

falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand because the God is able to make him stand. (Rom. 14:4)

A little further he adds:

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you belittle your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ... Every one of us shall give account of himself before God. (Rom. 14:10,12)

There are many things we are told to do with our brother or sister. We are to rebuke them (Luk. 17:3). We are to exhort them daily (Heb. 3:13). We are to encourage them and warn them (1 Thess. 5:14).

Nowhere, however, are we told to determine whether or not they belong to the Lord.

We are told to determine whether we belong to the Lord (2 Cor. 13:5), but we are not told to determine whether our brother belongs to the Lord.

In fact, even a situation where a brother was in sexual immorality with his father's wife, Paul called for him to be removed from the church, but he did not say that he was not the Lord's. In fact, the very purpose of removing such a one was so that "his spirit might be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5).

Later, when Paul was to visit the Corinthians after his second letter to them, he spoke of Corinthian Christians who may not have repented of their uncleanness, sexual immorality, and loose living. He was looking for these Christians to *repent*. He was not branding them non-Christians.

The Lord knows those who are his. We have to let God sort out believers in the end. They are not our servants. We must let God judge them.

Do not, however, let this turn into the mistake that is commonly made in modern times. Wicked Christians are not to be judged as non-Christians, but they are to be judged as wicked and put out of the church until they repent.

I have written to you not to keep company with anyone called a brother who is sexually immoral, greedy, an idolator, insulting, a drunkard, or a pilferer. Do not even eat with someone like this. ... Remove the wicked person from among you. (1 Cor. 5:11,13)

For the first part of the foundation—the Lord knows those who are his—we must be careful not to determine for ourselves who belongs to him, for we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ where that will be determined, but we must also be careful not to let the wicked remain in our midst. Whether or not they choose to repent and return will determine for us whether they belong to Christ.

They went out from us, and it was proof that they were never of us. If they had been of us, then they would have continued with us. (1 Jn. 2:19)

### **Let Those Who Name the Name of Christ Depart from Iniquity**

The second part of the inscription, *written on the foundation of God* is that those who call themselves Christians must leave iniquity behind. This is not an advanced issue that can be put off until some future time of growth. This is part of the very foundation of God.

All the wicked must be put out of fellowship, as we saw in the last section. No exceptions are made for new Christians or those from troubled pasts. We do not have to be perfect on our first day, but there are things that have to be immediately put away.

The word iniquity is translated from the Greek *adikia*, which is a very general term for unrighteousness. What we cannot learn from the specific Greek word, however, we can learn from other Scriptures, for the New Testament has much to say about departing from iniquity.

So then, I say this, and I testify in the Lord, that from now on you do not walk an other gentiles walk, in the depravity of their mind. Their understanding darkened, and they are alienated from the life of God due to the ignorance that is in them and because of the blindness of their heart. They are past feeling and have given themselves over to loose living, working all uncleanness with greediness.

But you have not learned Christ in this way. If you have heard him and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus, then you must take off, as regards your old behavior, the old man, who is corrupt due to deceitful desires.

You must be renewed in the spirit of your mind, which is created from God in righteousness and true holiness.

So, putting away lying, let everyone speak truth with his neighbor ... Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down upon your wrath, nor make room for the devil. Let him that stole steal no more, but instead let him work,

doing with his hands what is good, so that he may have something to give to those in need. Let no rotten talk come out of your mouth, but only that which is useful for building up, so that it can minister grace to those who hear.

Don't grieve the Holy Spirit ... Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, complaining, slander, be removed from you, along with all ill-will. (Eph. 4:17-31)

In this passage, Paul has made it clear what it means to depart from iniquity. He says it similarly in his letter to the Colossians:

Put to death your the things belonging to the body on the earth: sexual immorality, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and greediness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. ... But now you must also get rid of all these: anger, wrath, ill-will, slander, and obscene speech out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have taken off the old man with his deeds. (Col. 3:5-6,8-9)

Departing from iniquity is just what we would think that it is. We have to stop doing evil! No sexual immorality. Avoid what is unclean. Don't be greedy. Stop lying. Control your temper. Don't insult or complain. In general, watch what comes out of your mouth.

These are things we all know are consistent with being a Christian, that is, if we heard and learned of Christ in truth.

Peter gives similar general instructions:

Finally, all of you be of one mind. Have compassion for one another; love as brothers, tenderly and kindly. Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult. On the contrary, bless ... For the one that would love life and see good days should keep his tongue from speaking evil and his lips from deceit. He should avoid evil and do good; he should seek peace and pursue it. (1 Pet. 3:8-11)

It is clear then, what we should do.

These things, *and these things only*, are the inscription on the foundation of God.

These things do not include any of the things that American Christians typically divide over. There's no mention here of tongues or spiritual gifts. They are not inscribed on the sure foundation of God. There's no mention of a position on eternal security on the

plaque declaring the tenets that belong to God's sure foundation. There's no mention of whether the rapture will be pre- or post-trib. In fact, there's no mention of the rapture or tribulation at all!

Is it really possible that these seemingly important doctrinal positions, positions we have so commonly divided over, have nothing to do with the foundation of God? Is it really possible that it's *wrong* for us to divide over these things?

It's more than possible. In fact, it's more than wrong. Paul says it's *sick* ...

## Departing from Iniquity Is True "Sound Doctrine"

If anyone teaches other than this and does not consent to healthy words, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which concerns godliness, then he is proud and knows nothing. Instead ***he has a sick obsession with questions and arguments about words***, from which come envy, strife, slander, evil suspicions, and useless diatribes from men with ruined minds and devoid of the truth. These suppose that godliness is a means of gain. Withdraw from such people. (1 Tim. 6:3-5)

This translation is produced by me, but it's not inaccurate. Check modern translations with talk about a "morbid interest" in disputes and other such terminology. Strong's Concordance defines the Greek word *noseo* as "to be sick" or "to be taken with such an interest in a thing as amounts to a disease."

Paul obviously has very strong words concerning those that will not consent to healthy words, to the teaching which concerns godliness.

So what are these healthy words?

I think what you will find if you peruse the Scriptures is that those healthy words are the very ones written upon the foundation of God: "Let those who name the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

A look at the context surrounding 1 Tim. 6:3 will show that the topic is iniquity; it is a general unrighteousness. In the verses immediately preceding, Paul has told servants to honor and serve their masters in order not to bring insult to the name and teaching of God.

Before that, throughout the end of chapter 5, Paul has been speaking in general about those who sin.

After those verses, Paul speaks of those who love and pursue money.

You would think that if healthy teaching were the sorts of things we modern Christians argue about, those topics would be mentioned somewhere in the vicinity of this comment about the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which concerns godliness.

Instead, Paul really seems to mean that healthy words really are those which *concern godliness*.

In fact, there is one passage in which Paul plainly states that righteousness, and thus departing from unrighteousness, really is what healthy teaching is all about.

Titus chapter two is the most direct reference to "healthy teaching" in the Bible. It begins with:

Speak the things which are appropriate to healthy teaching. (Tit. 2:1)

What does that chapter go on to teach?

It is full of the following sorts of things:

- The older men should be sober and serious. They should be solid in love and patience.
- The older women behave in a holy way and avoid too much drink.
- The younger women should be serious and love their husband and children.
- The younger men should be sober of mind.
- Timothy himself should be an example of good works.
- Servants should obey their masters and not pilfer.

Once again there is a marked absence of the issues found in systematic theologies and church's statements of faith. Wouldn't it be fascinating to attend a church whose statement of faith included, "We believe older women should avoid drinking too much." Or how about, "We believe that employees should obey their employers, serve

them well, and avoid stealing in order not to bring shame to God"?

Paul does get into some deeper theology at the end of Titus chapter two:

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us so that he might **redeem us from all iniquity** and purify for himself his own unique people, zealous for good works. (Tit. 2:11-14)

Strange. That phrase, "redeem us from all iniquity," sounds a lot like the inscription on the foundation of God, doesn't it?

It seems that whether we understand what healthy words and healthy teaching are, the grace of God understands it. The grace of God is not teaching people that they can do whatever they want because they are covered by the blood of Jesus. The grace of God is teaching people that they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age or they will not inherit the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5). The grace of God is teaching God's people things that will lead them to be unique, a people zealous for good works.

### **What Will Happen if We Ignore the Inscription on the Foundation of God**

I suppose we need to look at what will happen if we do not depart from iniquity. It's a lot worse than you might think. In fact, Peter says it would be good to be afraid of that possibility all of our life.

If you address as Father the One who judges by each person's work, without partiality, then pass the time of sojourning here with fear. (1 Pet. 1:17)

We sometimes don't fear because Jesus died for us. Peter, however, the chief of apostles, to whom Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom of heaven so that he could open heaven to Jews, Samaritans, and gentiles alike ... this Peter says that we should be afraid **because** Jesus died for us.

Since you know that you were not redeemed with things that can perish, like

silver and gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (1 Pet. 1:18)

Maybe our modern idea of what Jesus died is not so accurate after all. If it does not lead us to put off the old man, to be zealous for good works, and to fear, then maybe we didn't learn about Jesus in truth? You think?

Without going into too much detail, let's at least address the things the Scriptures say clearly and to Christians about what happens if we ignore the inscription on the foundation of God. Simply put, there are two repeated warnings: death and disinheritance.

1 Cor. 6:9-11, Gal. 5:19-21, and Eph. 5:5 all say that if we don't depart from iniquity, then we will not inherit God's kingdom. Rom. 8:12-13 and Gal. 6:7-9 say that if we live by the influence of our body we will die. In fact, Paul said that he disciplined his body and brought it under subjection so that he wouldn't be "disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27).

That word "disqualified" is the same word he uses of those who do not have Jesus Christ in them in 2 Cor. 13:5.

If this is hard for you to believe, or if it is turning your theology upside down, you can get help. I have a web page called *Sola Fide*, which means "Faith Alone," at <http://www.christian-history.org/sola-fide.html>. It can help you with your theology on salvation. It also shows you that these Scriptures line right up with what was taught in the apostles' churches.

Eventually I will do an ebook teaching the same things to help erase some of your difficulties.

If you're horrified by the thought of being required to depart from iniquity, then you really need to hear the Gospel. When Paul preached the Gospel, he told people—Jews and gentiles alike—that they should repent and then do works that are appropriate to repentance. At least, that's what he said he preached (Acts 26:20).

## Jesus' Warnings to the Churches

One of the most interesting portions of Scripture is Revelation chapters two and three. Those chapters contain seven letters *dictated directly by the Lord Jesus* to seven churches, explaining to them what he's pleased with and what he's not so pleased with.

Those chapters should be real important, shouldn't they? Talk about directly applying to our lives!

Let's look at the things that bothered Jesus:

- Church at Ephesus: left their first love
- Church at Smyrna: clean slate!
- Church at Pergamos: doctrine of Balaam, and thus the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which are ...
  1. Putting a stumbling block in front of God's people
  2. Eating things sacrificed to idols
  3. Sexual immorality
- Church at Thyatira: tolerating Jezebel, who taught the same things the Nicolaitans taught
- Church at Sardis: imperfect works, defiled garments (not very specific)
- Church at Philadelphia: another clean slate!
- Church at Laodicea: works were lukewarm

Though not all these things are carefully defined, it is nonetheless apparent that what mattered to Jesus was the inscription on the foundation of God. He wanted these churches to depart from iniquity!

You will look in vain in those chapters for a single comment from Jesus about the things we learn in Bible school or that we put in our statements of faith. No comments about the Trinity. No rebukes for not speaking in tongues. No admonishments for an incorrect assessment of baptism.

No, just one thing mattered to Jesus: their works.

*I know your works. (2:2)*

*Repent and do the first works, or else ... (2:5)*  
*I know your works. (2:9)*  
*I know your works. (2:13)*  
*I know your works ... and your works. (2:19)*  
*I will repay you according to your works. (2:23)*  
*He that overcomes and keeps my works ... to him will I give authority ... (2:26)*  
*I know your works (3:1)*  
*I have not found your works perfect before God (3:2)*  
*I know your works (3:8)*  
*I know your works (3:15)*

In this case, Jesus does mention his return. Finally, one comment about something that can be found in a systematic theology! Jesus' return!

So when did he say it would happen?

Well, silly, he didn't say when it would happen. He can't say when it will happen because even he doesn't know that! (Mark 13:32). Instead, this is what he said ...

- *Remember from where you have fallen and do the first works; otherwise, I will come to you quickly and remove your candlestick from its place, unless you repent. (2:5)*
- *Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and fight against [the Nicolaitans] with the sword of my mouth. (2:16)*
- *Behold, I come quickly. Hold tightly to what you have so that no one takes your crown. (3:11)*

Hmm. Okay, this isn't systematic theology. This is a warning to be quick about repenting.

Unfortunately for those of us who aren't interested in being transformed by the freeing power of the Spirit of God, but fortunately for those of us who are interested, Jesus' thoughts towards the churches can be summed up rather well by his closing words to the church in Sardis:

You have a few names, even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments. These shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

He that overcomes, this one shall be clothed in white garments. I will not erase his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. (3:4-5)

## Final Comments on Healthy Teaching

Jesus' words are healthy teaching. According to Paul's letter to Titus, Jesus' died to purify for himself a people that would be zealous for good works (2:14). Just a few verses later, Paul tells Titus that he should "affirm constantly" that those who believe in God should be careful to maintain good works (3:8).

But it's not just healthy teaching that we should do good works. It is the work of God to cause us to do good works. Jesus will encourage us, exhort us, rebuke us, chasten us, grace us, empower us, and in every other way help us to do good works.

*We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. (Eph. 2:10)*

Today we have missed this. We have "swerved aside" into doctrinal arguments, which Paul calls "empty chatter."

The goal of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, from a good conscience, and out of a sincere faith. Some have swerved aside from this to empty chatter. They desire to be teachers of the Law, but they don't understand what they say nor what they confidently assert. (1 Tim. 1:5-7)

This is our state today. Healthy teaching is that which produces godliness. Godliness, of course, is primarily marked by love. Thus, the goal of our teaching should be love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.

In fact, the very goal of the Scriptures is that we would be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17).

Whether we like it or not, Jehovah's Witnesses can qualify as good and godly Christians by this standard and Mother Theresa most certainly does.

Read through the verses on the Judgment some time. Look for some other test other than the way we have lived. Read passages like Matthew 25:31-46, John 5:27-29, Romans 2:5-8, 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, 1 Peter 1:17, and Revelation 20:11-15. Look in vain for some other test than what we have done.

Then believe.

I know that any good Protestant has to be breathing hard by now. Good works; Jehovah's Witnesses going to heaven; how much worse can it get?

If all this is true, then why did Jesus die?

I've been told I'm not very reassuring. I'll try to repent of that here and take some time to attempt to briefly explain the glorious sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's spotless lamb, on the cross.

## **The Glorious Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

There is far too much information in this booklet. You really should have a paramedic on hand in case you start to choke. I've been told before that sometimes my teaching is like drinking from a fire hydrant.

In an effort to reassure you, I want you to know that not only is the teaching in this booklet scriptural—after all, I am showing you an abundance of Scriptures and interpreting them in a readily apparent and obvious manner—but the things I'm teaching represent historic Christianity.

I didn't make up any of this or find any of this on my own.

This is simply what all Christians taught for a couple centuries after Jesus Christ died.

Really.

Understand first that Jesus Christ's death does not lend itself to simple explanation. It's something God did. It's a mystery, and it's a far greater thing than our puny human minds can grasp.

***Understand second that the most common modern description of Jesus' death, at least by Protestants, is both false and an insult to God.***

Sorry for stating that so bluntly, but I don't want you to be confused.

Jesus did not "pay" for all your sins on the cross. Paul states quite plainly that you will account for both your good and bad works at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). When Jesus wrote to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation two and three, he made no allowance for his death to pay for their bad works. He was going to stop some of those churches from being churches, and he was going to punish some of the Christians for their sins and even blot their name from the Book of Life for defiling their garments.

## **Drastic Errors in Our Modern Doctrine of the Atonement**

Again, let me make it clear here that what I am about to say is the historic doctrine of the church. You can read through the many writings of the church for the first two centuries after Jesus' death, and you will find them teaching all the same things I am about to teach here.

If you are going to panic, don't panic over what you're about to read. Panic that you've been taught something different than what you're about to read!

### **1. The Scriptures never mention anything about Jesus paying our debts by his death.**

There's not much to add here. Modern Protestants regularly teach that Jesus paid our debts. We sing, "Jesus paid it all; all to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain; he made it white a snow." Another song has, "He paid a debt he did not owe; I owed a debt I could not pay; I needed someone to wash my sins away ... Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay."

Jesus didn't pay a debt because there isn't a debt to pay ...

### **2. God didn't need Jesus' death to forgive sin.**

Let me say first that Jesus' death is tied to the forgiveness of sins. The Scriptures not only say that Jesus died for sins, but they say that we have forgiveness of sins through his blood. Please don't hear any of the following wrong. ***Jesus' blood is clearly and repeatedly tied to the forgiveness of sins in the New Testament.***

But God didn't need Jesus to die to forgive sins.

God's announcement to Moses was that he forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin (Ex. 34:6-7). David said that God didn't want sacrifice to forgive sin. He said that God wanted a broken heart and a contrite spirit (Ps. 51:16-17). Ezekiel said that if a wicked man would turn from his wicked ways, then all his sins would be forgotten and he would live (Ezek. 18:21-23).

It has always been simple repentance that leads to the forgiveness of sins. That has not changed. When the Jews heard about Cornelius, the first gentile, receiving the Gospel, they commented, "So then God has also granted the gentiles ***the repentance that leads to life***" (Acts 11:18, emphasis added).

### **The apostles never told a lost person that Jesus died for their sins.**

The apostles told the church regularly that Jesus died to procure the forgiveness of their sins. You'll find it all over the epistles.

Search all you will in the book of Acts, however, and you will never find a place where the apostles told a lost person that Jesus died for them. It's just not a part of the proclamation of the Gospel to the lost.

Paul does say in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus' death for sins is part of the Gospel. However, everything about Jesus' life is part of the Gospel. The writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are known as Gospels by us, and Mark calls his writing a Gospel (1:1).

Jesus' death is part of the Gospel, but it's not a part of the Gospel that the apostles preached to the lost.

Read through the book of Acts. Read Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Read Paul's sermon in the synagogue in Acts 13, and his defenses of the Gospel before Agrippa, Felix, and others. Paul almost persuaded King Agrippa to be a

Christian in Acts 26, but he did it without telling him that Jesus died for sin.

This is unbelievable to modern Protestants because we think that faith in Christ means believing he died for our sins. It does not. Faith in Christ mean faith in Christ, not faith in some facts about his death, even if those facts are true.

The person who believes in Christ joins his school. He hears about Jesus Christ and comes to believe that he is the Son of God. He comes to believe that Jesus can deliver him from his sins, turn him to God, and empower him to live for God. He comes to believe that Jesus Christ is the path to the Holy Spirit.

This is faith, and you do not have to know that Jesus died for your sins in order to have it.

That's quite obviously true because no one who received Christ in the book of Acts did so already knowing that Jesus died for their sins except perhaps the apostles.

## **So Why Did Jesus Die?**

As I said earlier, that's a difficult thing to explain. There is no more difficult theological study, whether you do that study in the Bible or in church history, than the study of the atonement. It is not, however, so difficult that we can't say some things about it.

### **Jesus died for our sins**

If Jesus died for our sins, and the Scriptures say he did, then why will our bad works follow us to judgment?

That's a difficult question to answer, but even a cursory reading of the New Testament makes it obvious that our sins will only be forgiven if we repent. Those who do not repent will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Instead, they'll be judged like the sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:5-7). Peter tells us that if we aren't adding virtue, knowledge, and some other qualities to our faith on an ongoing basis, then we'll end up blind, forgetting that we were once purged from our sins (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

So our sins are not simply paid for.

I used to simply say that Jesus' death gave us the power to repent, and repentance always brings about God's forgiveness.

It's not that simple, however. I was wrong. Verses like 1 John 1:7 turned me away from that idea. It says, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin." While that says that we must walk in the light to experience that ongoing cleansing, it's nonetheless the blood of Christ that is cleansing us, and it's not repentance that cleanses us.

Let it suffice to say that Jesus' blood has procured forgiveness of sins for those that repent and walk with God. It has brought about God's favor and access to God.

All of that will be better understood if we understand the part of Jesus' atonement that is so often left out.

### **Jesus delivers from sin**

The primary thing that Jesus' death does for us is overcome sin.

We've seen in the rest of this ebook how God calls us to live in the New Testament. The inscription on the foundation of God says that those who name the name of Christ must depart from iniquity.

The problem is that the New Testament also makes it clear that people don't simply depart from iniquity. Romans 3 teaches us that everyone is confined under sin, Jew and gentile alike. Romans 7 teaches us that we're not solving that problem on our own. Sin lives in us, and it *will* overthrow us.

God, however, has an answer:

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. (Rom. 8:2)

The law of sin and death was just described in Romans 7. There are Christians today

who teach that we will live in Romans 7 all our lives. They even teach that Paul lived in Romans 7 and was talking about himself there. I've never understood how they can say this. Paul asked who could deliver him from the body of death at the end of Romans 7. Have they not read his answer? He did not say that no one could deliver him. He said that Jesus Christ could deliver him.

Romans 8:2 begins the explanation of how God delivers us from Romans 7. He does that by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

But what does that mean?

The next two verses give us the story straight and clear ...

For what the Law could not do, due to being weak because of the flesh, God did. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (8:3-4)

Jesus' death, and our joining ourselves into that death—which was done by baptism in the days of the apostles (Rom. 6:3-5), but is sometimes done by prayer today—is what saves us. Jesus, in some way that will of course be incomprehensible to us who are mere humans, puts sin to death in our flesh when we join ourselves to him by faith, submitting to him in baptism. Then, just as we are buried into his death in baptism, so we are raised into newness of life.

What happens when this happens? Something incredible.

Oh, how we underestimate and devalue grace. Grace is that wonderful, powerful, incomprehensible influence of God that gives us power over sin and power for a lot of other things as well. Sin won't have dominion over us because we're under grace (Rom. 6:14). Grace will help us in our times of need (Heb. 4:16). Grace is the power behind the spiritual gifts and all Christian service (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

No wonder Paul began and ended his letters with "grace be with you"!

**Jesus died to obtain a people devoted to himself**

We've already seen that Jesus died to purify for himself a people zealous for good works (Tit. 2:13-14).

Such things are said in other places in the Scripture, too. Rom. 14:9 says the purpose of Jesus' death and his resurrection is that he might be Lord of the living and the dead. 2 Cor. 5:15 says that he died so that we would no longer live for ourselves but for him.

### **The Main Point**

The main point of all this is that we are wasting our time believing that Jesus' death is going to make up for our disobedience to God. Hebrews says that if we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, then there's no more sacrifice for sin, but instead there's a fearful looking forward towards judgment (Heb. 10:26-27).

In fact, it's worse than that. His death and our becoming Christians means that if we continue in sin, then our punishment will be *worse* than that given to Israelites under the Law of Moses. (Heb. 10:28-29)

Don't fool yourself into thinking that's some special, particularly awful sin. That's simply turning back to a life outside of Christ. In Hebrews, the specific falling away is going back to Judaism, and the warnings of Hebrews are directed at that sin mainly.

However, Peter says basically the same thing, and he's not talking about returning to Judaism. He's talking about returning to a life of sin like a dog returning to his vomit (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

The death of Christ should make you a child of God if you've become a believer in Christ. Keep in mind that it's not sufficient to become a believer in Jesus' death. The devil believes in Jesus' death. But to believe in Jesus Christ so that you become his disciple, that is true faith, and that will make you a child of God.

The child of God will *always* live righteously. We've seen that it's inscribed on the foundation of God that we are to depart from iniquity. The apostle John says it even straighter:

Little children, let no one deceive you. He that practices righteousness is righteous, just as [Christ] is righteous. (1 Jn. 3:7)

A real belief in Christ will produce a righteousness that can be seen. Only such a person is righteous as Christ is righteous. The righteousness of Christ is not imputed to the unrepentant, and it is certainly not imputed to those that do not depart from iniquity.

As John says it, in perhaps the bluntest way possible:

The one who says, "I know him," but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (1 Jn. 2:4)

It's difficult to add anything to *that*, isn't it?

## **Appendix A: Early Christian Writings in Support of the Healthy Teaching**

### **Polycarp**

Use the passage about raising us up if we keep his commandments