

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### REAL CONVERSION

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist"

- II Timothy 4:3-5

Chapter Two of this book began with a quotation from Asahel Nettleton, the American evangelist who opposed Finney's decisionist techniques. This statement could almost be seen as a prophecy concerning the evil effects of decisionism:

These evils are destined to be propagated from generation to generation, waxing worse and worse.

- Asahel Nettleton,

1854 edition of *The Life and Labours of Asahel Nettleton*

Here are the main points we have covered so far in this book:

1. Our culture is unravelling, with no end in sight.
2. Decisionism has failed to cure the problem.
3. Stronger preaching against sin is needed.
4. Careful counselling by the pastor should be done in a quiet place. There should usually be more than one such counselling session, perhaps many in certain cases, but at least a few in all cases.

Imagine yourself going to a doctor's office with a bleeding sore on your face. In the office are a number of people with crutches, some in wheelchairs, others wheezing, barely able to breathe. You are all waiting to see the doctor. After a few minutes, a nurse runs in and gives everyone in the room a red pill. Then she smiles brightly and says, "You're all cured! Go home!"

"But, but," you protest, "we have different symptoms."

"Oh, that's all right," the nurse answers, "One prescription fits everyone."

"But I wanted to see the doctor," you protest.

"Oh, he never sees anyone who is sick," she answers. "He delegates that to me."

As she turns to go, she says, "Come back when you're well. The doctor will be glad to see you then."

Sadly, many churches handle lost inquirers about like that. ***If medical doctors treated patients in their offices like many pastors treat inquirers in their churches, they would constantly be faced with malpractice suits.***

Rev. F. L. Chapell warned that our churches would fill up with lost people unless pastors made sure they are converted:

The dark days that preceded the Great Awakening will come again unless somebody stands firmly and clearly and decidedly by the doctrine of a converted church-membership.<sup>1</sup>

The tragic situation in our churches today could easily be reversed by following Spurgeon's advice to preachers:

If you wish to see results from your sermons you must be accessible to inquirers...you should appoint frequent and regular seasons for seeing all who are seeking after Christ, and you should cordially invite such to come and speak with you.<sup>2</sup>

Spurgeon's advice echos that given by Richard Baxter in the seventeenth century:

The work of conversion is the first and great thing we must drive at; after this we must labour with all our might... We must be ready to give advice to inquirers, who come to us. A minister is not to be merely a public preacher, but to be known as a counsellor for their souls, as the physician is for their bodies... To this end it is very necessary that you be well acquainted with practical cases, and especially that you be acquainted with the nature of saving grace, and be able to assist them in trying

their state, and in resolving the main question that concerns their everlasting life or death. One word of reasonable, prudent advice, given by a minister to persons in necessity, may be of more help than many sermons.<sup>3</sup>

These two men from the past strongly urge us to love the lost enough to spend time with them and help them.

### **Evangelistic Preaching**

The kind of counselling we are suggesting will be of little help unless it comes after evangelistic preaching. By this we mean preaching which does two things:

1. Exposes sin by the Law, showing the sinner that he is lost and helpless (Galatians 3:24) by appealing to his conscience.
2. Extolls the virtues of the gospel: i.e. the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Corinthians 15:1-4) as the only remedy for sin.

There is a great need for preaching on the evilness of sin today. As Dr. J. Gresham Machen so aptly put it, "Without the consciousness of sin, the whole of the gospel will seem to be an idle tale."<sup>4</sup> There is a great need for preaching on the wrath of God as well.

By this, we do not mean verse-by-verse teaching, or preaching *about* certain doctrines (which depersonalizes them - always a trap). We are talking about preaching to the people in front of you on their sin, on Hell, on the wrath of God.

Duncan Campbell saw the need for preaching on sin and judgment back in the 1940's and 1950's:

Duncan Campbell was often criticized for declaring the wrath of God night after night, but he saw this only as a backcloth to the gospel.<sup>5</sup> Campbell's method was to preach on sin, condemnation and hell during the services.<sup>6</sup>

It should be remembered that the last great regional revival in the Western world occurred under Duncan Campbell's preaching.<sup>7</sup> Oh, for God to send such preachers again, at this hour!

### **Focus on These Great Baptist and Protestant Themes**

Evangelistic preaching, to be effective, *must focus on these great Baptist and Protestant themes:*

- The *self-examination of the heart*,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on the need to examine themselves to see whether they are in the faith? II Corinthians 13:5).
- The *depravity of man*,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on their depravity lately? Ephesians 2:1, 2, 5).
- The *atonement of Jesus*,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on the atonement of Jesus for their sins lately? Romans 5:6-9; I Corinthians 15:3).
- The *Last Judgment*,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on what will happen to them at the Last Judgment lately? Revelation 20:11-15).
- The *unpardonable sin*,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on the unpardonable sin lately? Matthew 12:31-32).
- The *reprobation of sinners*,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on the reprobation of sinners lately? Romans 1:24-28).
- The *fire of Hell*,  
(Have you told the unconverted people in your church that they are going to burn forever in Hell lately? Matthew 5:46; Luke 16:19-31).
- The *Ten Commandments*,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on the fact that they have broken the Ten Commandments lately? Exodus 20:3-17; I John 3:4).
- The *Blood of Jesus*,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on the Blood of Jesus lately? Strangely, some Bible preachers are suddenly unsure of the Blood in our day. There will be no revival without great Blood

sermons. If there is no Blood in Heaven, then you will never get in there! Hebrews 9:7; 10:19).

- The ***Resurrection of Jesus***,  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on the physical resurrection of Jesus lately, or do you reserve this subject for Easter only? Remember, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain (empty); ye are yet in your sins" (I Corinthians 15:17). Remember also that "we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). Sermons on this subject are especially important in a day of charismatism and new-age mysticism.).
- The ***absolute necessity of regeneration***  
(Have you preached to the people in your church on their need of regeneration recently? John 3:3, 7; Titus 3:5).

These great themes should constantly appear as the subjects of evangelistic sermons, if we wish to see conversions, and if we truly desire revival.

Asahel Nettleton pointed out that these doctrines were preached by the Apostles and that:

With these, idol temples were demolished - sinners pricked in their hearts, and brought to bow submissively to the Saviour's feet.

These are the doctrines which were preached in the time of the glorious reformation from papacy, throughout the whole Protestant world. These were the weapons used by Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Cranmer, and Knox. They went forth with the sword of the Spirit pressing the consciences of men...

These too are the doctrines which have been preached in the late revivals, in New England. Doctrines which have awakened the enmity of thousands, and have shown sinners their opposition to God. Doctrines which many have opposed with all their hearts, in which contest thousands have been convicted and slain. These are the weapons which have been wielded by the hand of the divine Spirit and have been mighty through God to the

pulling down of strong holds. These are the doctrines which thousands have embraced, by their own confession, at the very time when they submitted to God...<sup>8</sup>

Oh, for God to send Spirit-anointed preachers to take up these grand old themes of our Baptist and Protestant forebears, and proclaim them up and down the land without fear of the lost evangelicals seated in the pews in front of them!

The kind of counselling which follows will do little good unless it is preceded by hard, sin-condemning, conscience-probing, Christ-exalting evangelistic preaching.

Dr. John R. Rice\* said:

In the very nature of the case, people do not repent of their sins until they are conscious and convicted of their sins. Jesus said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Until a man knows he is sick, he does not feel the need of a physician. A preacher friend said, "You have to get people lost before you can get them saved."

Why would a sinner want Christ if he were not conscious of his sin, did not feel the need of a Saviour?<sup>9</sup>

#### **Sin Confronted in the Pastor's Study**

When the sermon is over, lost people are invited to my office. They sit there quietly reading the following material. They read this before Dr. Cagan or I see them. The following pages are a reproduction of what we give to the people when they come to my office after the sermon:

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\*We agree with Dr. Rice on the subject of preaching against sin. We disagree with him on the subject of Charles G. Finney's decisionist techniques and on some related issues. But many of Dr. Rice's sermons are evangelistic classics, such as "The Unpardonable Sin," "All Satan's Apples Have Worms," "Neglect, the Shortest Way to Hell," "Missing God's Last Train for Heaven," "God's Slaughter Crew," "The Scarlet Sin," "Religious But Lost," and many others. Preachers should obtain and read these powerful, conscience-probing sermons. It would do many churches good if pastors preached these sermons by Dr. Rice to their people. I myself have done just that on several occasions, always giving full credit to Rice before preaching.

(The following three pages are a reproduction of the sheet we give to those who come to the pastor's office after each sermon for counselling on conversion)

## **YOUR BIGGEST PROBLEM - SIN**

Dear Friend:

I am glad you came here today. I hope you came because you are thinking about your *sins*. Your *sins* are many and they are terrible in God's sight.

(1) Your *sins* have separated you from God:

"Your iniquities (sins) have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you"  
(Isaiah 59:2).

(2) Your *sins* are all known by God:

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil" (Proverbs 15:3a).

God knows every *sin* you have ever committed.

(3) Your *sins* are recorded in God's books in Heaven:

"The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works"  
(Revelation 20:12b).

Every *sin* you have ever committed was seen by God and has been written down in these books in Heaven. You are in trouble!

(4) At the Last Judgment, you will stand before God, and He will read your *sins* out of His books. Your *sins* will condemn you:

"Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23b).

(5) Even your *sins* which you kept secret will be read from the books by God at the Last Judgment:

"For God shall bring every work into judgment,  
with every secret thing" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

- (6) Sinful *words* which you have said will be read out of the books  
by God, and your *sinful* words will condemn you:

"For by thy words...thou shalt be condemned"  
(Matthew 12:37).

- (7) Your *sinful* thoughts will be read out of God's books. *Sins* you  
have thought about will condemn you.

"And God saw...that every imagination of the  
thoughts of his heart was only evil" (Genesis 6:5).

- (8) You have *sinned* by missing church. This shows you have  
broken the first commandment given by Jesus in Matthew  
22:37-38. This is a terrible *sin*:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,  
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the  
first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38).

Each time you miss church, this *sin* of not loving God as you should is  
recorded in God's books. You are in trouble because of your *sins*. This *sin*  
alone is enough to condemn you.

- (9) You have committed at least one of the following *sins*:

- PRIDE
- CURSING
- GREED
- REJECTING JESUS
- FALSE RELIGION
- HATRED AND ANGER
- SELFISHNESS
- TALKING BACK TO PARENTS
- LYING
- SEX SIN
- PORNOGRAPHY
- STEALING

- DRUGS OR ALCOHOL
- NOT LOVING GOD AS MUCH AS YOU SHOULD
- MISSING CHURCH

"Sin is the transgression (or breaking) of the law"  
(I John 3:4).

- (10) You have committed at least one of these horrible *sins*.  
Your *sins* are written down in God's books in Heaven.

Even if you could stop *sinning* now, it would *not* help you. If you never again committed even one *sin*, it is *too late* for you. The *sins* you have already done are written in God's books. These *sins* of yours are enough already to condemn you. ***IT IS TOO LATE FOR YOU TO BE GOOD.***

Even if you are sorry for your *sins* it will not help you. Your sorrow will not remove your *sins* from God's books. ***IT IS TOO LATE FOR YOU TO BE SORRY FOR YOUR SINS.***

NOTHING YOU CAN DO CAN GET RID OF YOUR ***SINS!*** NO ONE BUT ***JESUS*** CAN TAKE YOUR ***SINS*** OUT OF GOD'S BOOKS.

NO ONE CAN REMOVE YOUR ***SINS*** BUT ***JESUS*** - BY HIS BLOOD. HE WAS CRUCIFIED TO PAY THE PENALTY FOR YOUR SINS.

NO ONE BUT JESUS HAS "POWER ON EARTH TO FORGIVE ***SINS***"  
(Matthew 9:6).

DO YOU WANT ***JESUS*** TO FORGIVE YOUR ***SINS*** AND REMOVE THEM FROM GOD'S BOOKS?

WILL YOU COME TO ***JESUS*** SO HE CAN WASH YOUR ***SINS*** AWAY WITH HIS BLOOD?

JESUS IS ***NOT*** ANGRY WITH YOU. HE LOVES YOU.

JESUS IS ALIVE. HE IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD IN HEAVEN.

(The sheet we give out to inquirers ends here)

## **An Outline on Counselling**

C. H. Spurgeon strongly urged every Baptist preacher to have a quiet room where he could talk at length with the lost. He told the students at his Pastor's College:

It is shocking to think that there are ministers who have no method whatever for meeting the anxious. From the very first you should appoint frequent and regular seasons for seeing all who are seeking after Christ, and you should cordially invite such to come and speak with you. Seek out the wandering sheep one by one, do not grudge your labour, for your Lord in His parable represented the good shepherd as bringing home his sheep, not in a flock, but one at a time.<sup>10</sup>

Speaking on the same subject, the seventeenth-century preacher Richard Baxter said:

The work of conversion is the first and great thing we must drive at; after this we must labour with all our might...We must be ready to give advice to inquirers, who come to us. A minister is not to be merely a public preacher, but to be known as a counsellor for their souls, as the physician is for their bodies.<sup>11</sup>

These two men from the past strongly urge us to love the lost enough to spend time with them and help them. This manual on conversion is given to help pastors in the counselling work which Spurgeon and Baxter described.

We do not believe that people are saved through our methods alone. Anyone who comes to Jesus is saved (John 6:37). But we believe that the following manual can be helpful in making sure inquiring souls actually do come to Him.

### **Are We Over-Reacting?**

A copy of this manuscript was sent to a lady to be reviewed. She is a very intelligent person with a seminary degree from a world-famous school. The manuscript came back from her with a comment that the first part of this book is insightful, but that we have "over-reacted" in this final section, on counselling the lost.

We thought about that for several days. Then it dawned on Dr. Hymers that this lady is the wife of a pastor! Of course she would think we have over-reacted! ***If we are right, then her own husband is wrong, because he doesn't use the methods we give here!***

Before you conclude that this section is too detailed or too lengthy, please, dear reader, at least consider the possibility that we may have rediscovered something you need to know. Please be open to that possibility. Try to look at the subject of counselling the unconverted through new eyes, as though you had never thought of it before. That way you will be less likely to close your mind, and emotionally reject what we say based on your own personal experience.

Remember, we are not giving a quick, untested answer to decisionism. Both of us are seminary graduates with earned doctorates. Dr. Cagan has twenty years' experience in the ministry. Dr. Hymers has forty years' experience. The ideas on counselling, which you are about to read, have been tested in our own church for many years. ***So, please, evaluate this section with great care.*** Don't simply reject our ideas with a knee-jerk emotional reaction.

### **What is Conversion?**

A. We must have in mind a definition of salvation through Christ.

Conversion gives a man a new nature and standing before God and, thus, produces a new direction in his life.

Conversion is the result of that work of the Holy Spirit which draws a lost sinner to Jesus Christ for justification and regeneration, and changes the sinner's standing before God from lost to saved, imparting divine life to the depraved soul, thus producing a new direction in the life of the convert. The objective side of salvation is justification. The subjective side of salvation is regeneration. The result is conversion.

1. Historically:

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

2. Personally:

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

As Spurgeon said, "That faith which saves the soul is believing on a person, depending upon Jesus for eternal life."<sup>12</sup>

3. The act of believing on Christ (also called trusting Christ) is the means by which the atonement historically given for all mankind is received by the individual sinner and applied to him. Christ died for all men and women, yet not all are saved, because most people do not trust Him.

4. This act of believing on Christ or trusting Him is no mere agreement to the historical facts of the gospel.

It is instead an act in which the sinner trusts in Christ the person, Christ Himself (John 1:12). A. T. Pierson was quoted by H. C. Thiessen in his *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Dr. Pierson wrote:

"Here, then, is the starting point for any who would exercise saving faith; he must *receive* Jesus as Savior, Christ, Son of God; not simply the witness God gave concerning His Son, but the Son of God *Himself*."<sup>13</sup>

Or, as C. H. Spurgeon put it, "The mere knowledge of these facts will not, however, save us, unless we really and truly trust our souls in the Redeemer's hands."<sup>14</sup>

5. This act is unique among all the things that a human being does. Although called a "work" in John 6:29, it is in a class of its own and is distinguished from all human works, such as going to church, giving up sins, witnessing, fasting, giving money, praying, rededicating your life, and so on.

Believing on Jesus is the *only* "work" or "decision" that will save a person (John 6:29).

The act of trusting Christ is actually supernatural:

- a. It reaches from earth to heaven, going outside of a person and even outside of this earthly universe.

While a sinner can of his own power give up sins, pray, come to church, read the Bible, and so on, he cannot perform either aspect of salvation: he cannot pay for his own sins (I Cor. 15:3-4) and he cannot of his own abilities, without the grace of God, come to Christ (John 6:44), who is in Heaven (Mark 16:19; Colossians 3:1; I Peter 3:22).

Thus, it would be impossible for a person to come to, trust, or otherwise contact Jesus, if it depended upon purely human faculties: but Jesus as the omnipresent Son of God is actually "standing at the door and knocking" (see Rev. 3:20) and the grace of God actually makes saving trust possible (Ephesians 2:8-9). How wonderful is the love of God!

- b. Furthermore, the sinner in his depraved state cannot be saved, and does not even want to be saved. He is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) with the "understanding darkened" (Eph. 4:18).

It is only God that awakens a sinner and places within him both a desire to come to Christ and the ability to do so, John 6:44.

Were it not for the grace of God, no lost sinner could or would trust in Christ, or even want to. But God's love is so marvellous and so great that not only did Christ die for us (Rom. 5:8) but God draws each person (through prevenient

grace) at least once in his life and makes it possible for him to trust Christ (Titus 2:11) if he chooses. "He first loved us" (I John 4:19).

"Herein is love, not that we loved God (we did not) but that he loved us (first), and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (I John 4:10).

6. When a person trusts Christ, he receives (whether he feels it or even knows it) all the benefits associated with Christ: forgiveness of sins, the new birth, and many other benefits. Christ Himself thus takes priority over all the results that go along with trusting Him: joy, peace, assurance, a new life, and even the new birth. If a person comes to Christ, he receives all the benefits of Christ thrown in, I Corinthians 1:30-31.
  7. The act of trusting Christ or believing on Christ or coming to Christ is the goal to be sought. The lost sinner must seek to trust Christ, and the pastor or personal worker must speak to the lost sinner with the intention of motivating him to trust Christ, Acts 8:30-37; Romans 10:14.
- B. There are many errors regarding salvation, declaring that it is not through Christ.
1. Salvation not necessary at all, with a person's "life-interest" or "life-trust" somewhere else: money, friends, family, knowledge, sex, self, etc. Often combined with a denial of Christian doctrine openly or practically; the person may think the Bible isn't true, deny the existence of Hell, think there is no afterlife, and so on.
  2. Salvation necessary, but obtained without Christ; by works, holiness, study, attendance at meetings, religiosity, abstaining from sins, prayer, confession, and so on. (e.g. Judaism, Islam, etc.)

3. Salvation allegedly by Christ, but in fact Christ is subjected to or "piped through" something else.
  - a. Catholic: Christ is mediated through baptism, communion, confession, church attendance, etc. (Worse: salvation through saints or the Virgin; Christ distant.)
  - b. Evangelical: Christ is obtained or mediated through a sinner's prayer (without saving faith in Jesus), doctrinal belief, study, church attendance, or something else; doing one of these things confers Christ or proves that a person has Him.
  - c. Pentecostal: Christ is obtained/mediated through experiences, tongues, good feelings, life going well, etc.

These errors are *ontologically* wrong; that is, they put Christ under or "pipe Him through" something less than Himself, such as church attendance, the mass, the sinner's prayer, or doctrine. In fact, we are saved by a *direct* trust in Christ, who is greater than these other things: "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17).

- C. All of these errors come short of actually trusting Christ, although His name may be used. Just as a Catholic who names Jesus but in fact trusts baptism is not saved, in the same way an evangelical who names the name of Jesus but in fact trusts the sinner's prayer or doctrinal belief instead of trusting Christ, Himself is not saved. This explains why many professing "born again" believers have no real Christian life, live in habitual gross sin, and in general give no evidence of union with Christ - simply because they have in fact not trusted Christ, not rested in Him, not entered into a saving union with Him, John 5:40; John 6:40.

The pastor is to guide the lost person towards a salvation experience through trusting Christ, just as Evangelist did in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

This *may* happen while a person prays a sinner's prayer, but does *not* happen *because* he prays the prayer. The key element is trusting Christ, not the prayer. John R. Rice wrote that a person can be saved without prayer in his tract, "What Must I Do to be Saved?" Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, and Dr. Hymers were all saved without saying a "sinner's prayer," by a simple act of faith in Jesus Himself, John 3:18. These men did not pray when they were saved, they simply put the trust of their hearts in Jesus. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10).

### Two Sides of Salvation

A. The subjective side of salvation - regeneration. (John 3:3; I John 3:9)

This is what is called the new birth itself; when the Holy Spirit imparts new life to the person who has trusted Christ. This gives him the power to live the Christian life and the new (divine) nature. This new life reflects itself in the convert, I Corinthians 6:11.

B. The objective side of salvation - justification. (Romans 5:1, 6-9, Romans 4:5; Isaiah 53)

This refers to the forgiveness of sins through the shed Blood of Christ who died on the Cross to pay for sins, Romans 5:8-9.

The proper order - justification precedes regeneration. This order places Christ in the most important place, where He ought to be. (The order is logical rather than chronological, since both happen in an instant when a person trusts Christ.)

C. The result - conversion.

1. A person who turns to Christ and trusts Him (believes on Him, unites with Him, comes to Him) for forgiveness (justification) is objectively justified and subjectively receives the new birth, Romans 4:5. As a result, he is converted, Matthew 18:3.

2. A person who looks to Christ for a mere spiritual "experience," for personal power (even to overcome sin), for feelings, for a change, and so on, will get neither justification nor regeneration, Acts 8:18-23. As a result, he will not be converted.
3. So, we want the inquirer to turn to Christ for the forgiveness of his sins, which are written in God's books in Heaven (e.g. Revelation 20:12-15). These sins will accuse the lost sinner at the Judgment even if he no longer commits them, because they are recorded in Heaven (Revelation 20:12). They can only be forgiven by the Blood of Christ, Hebrews 9:14, 22.

### **Stages of Conversion**

#### A. Introduction: Preliminary considerations

1. The only thing needed to be saved is to trust Christ. Thus, a person does not need to pass through a noticeable or discernable period of awakening or conviction of sin in order to be saved.
  - a. Some have been saved without being under conviction of sin at the moment of their conversion such as blind Bartimaeus, Mark 10:47-52, though he was undoubtedly aware of his sinful and miserable state and in that sense was prepared for conversion by prevenient grace.
  - b. However, in most cases people *do* need to see their sins at the moment of conversion, or they will not trust Christ. As Dr. J. Gresham Machen wrote:

"Without the consciousness of sin, the whole of the gospel will seem to be an idle tale."<sup>15</sup>

- c. Some wish to focus on the details of salvation and "how to" trust Christ, but have no sense of sin, so the entire process is an "idle tale" at best, John 8:44.
  - d. Some wish to analyze themselves and seek for a consciousness of sin as an end in itself rather than looking at Christ. This too is fruitless, Ephesians 4:18-19; I Timothy 4:2.
2. Trusting Christ is instantaneous.
- a. The "stages" suggested here usually come to pass over time. As Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote, "There may be such a thing as faith at first sight; but usually we reach faith by stages: we become interested, we consider, we hear evidence, and so are led to believe"<sup>16</sup> (cf. Mark 8:22-25). But the moment of belief is itself instantaneous.
  - b. However, these stages can happen quickly and be a logical order rather than an order in time, Acts 8:30-38. The important thing is to lead the person to Christ rather than to make an idol out of a process of awakening and conviction and seek that as though it were the goal itself.

B. The unawakened or careless sinner

Almost everyone who comes for counselling the first time or two is in this state. To be in this state does not mean that a person is not religious, does not have an outwardly clean life, or is not interested in the Bible, the church, or the external things of God. Nicodemus, the apostle Paul, and John the Baptist were unawakened yet religious and clean before their conversions, John 3:10; Acts 26:4-5; Acts 9:5; John 1:31, 33, 34.

"I knew him not" (John 1:31).

"I knew him not" (John 1:33).

"I saw" (John 1:34).

This is John the Baptist unconverted and then converted. John is a transitional figure between the Old and New Dispensations, so this cannot be emphasized too dogmatically. However, the above verses must have deep significance regarding John's own conversion.

It is the pastor's job through the use of the Bible, pleading and reasoning as the human instrument, and by the power of God as the divine instrument, to move the sinner into an awakened and convicted state, and finally to conversion.

Unawakened sinners, whether they are new to the church or whether they have been coming to church for a long time, tend to have these two characteristics:

1. They have preconceived religious opinions about God (the Father), Jesus Christ, salvation (how to get to Heaven), Heaven and Hell, and so on. Unawakened sinners hold to these opinions even though they may have been sitting under gospel preaching for years. They may outwardly profess orthodox Christianity but in fact upon examination have an entirely different religion (true of lost but orthodox Christians before the Great Awakening, the 1859 revival, etc.).

These opinions can be acquired at any time in life, usually by attending a church or religious meeting and hearing the gospel preached.

It is not necessary to attend a church many times in order to form a religious opinion. Many people have formed their opinions by attending a single religious meeting, or even by watching Christian television or by reading a book, or by conversations with others, during which religious opinions are expressed.

- a. It is important for the pastor to ask the sinner what was his church or religion in the past. This will give you an idea of how the sinner thinks.

- (i) People with a ***Catholic background*** will generally think in terms of salvation by works: quitting some sins, which they call "repentance," going to church, following Jesus, loving Jesus, confession, and generally being good. They will also often think that Jesus and God the Father are one and the same in every respect, and thus do not really understand how Jesus acts as the mediator between God and men (I Timothy 2:5).
- (ii) People with a ***Baptist, evangelical, or Reformed background*** will often trust baptism, saying the sinner's prayer, or mentally believing Christian doctrine, such as being able to recite the plan of salvation. They often abuse the doctrine of the security of the believer to the point of thinking that if they have at any time said a prayer, been baptized, joined a church, or believed Christian doctrine, they have therefore been saved and are now merely "backslidden," even though they have never been converted. Rededication is deadly to such a person. If he rededicates his life, he will go to Hell, because salvation and rededication come in two completely different ways.
- (iii) People with a ***charismatic or Pentecostal background*** usually think in terms of feelings and experiences. If a person has had an experience with what he thinks is the Holy Spirit, feels God's blessing in his life, or feels peace and joy in his heart, he considers himself saved. Many times such people come for counselling seeking assurance or another feeling when in fact they have never been saved by trusting ***Christ***.

- b. To explore further, the pastor should ask the sinner, "How do you hope to get to Heaven?" This will reveal what the sinner believes about salvation. It will reveal the sinner's false hope about salvation - what the sinner hopes to do, or thinks that he has already done, to get to Heaven.

If the sinner already thinks that he is going to Heaven (should he die then), the pastor should ask him what a person should do to get to Heaven. If the time is short, it is better to ask this rather than to have the sinner repeat what he considers to be his salvation testimony, which is often a long story of the experiences in the person's life, leading up to an abrupt ending, with little or no mention of Jesus forgiving sins by His Blood. Cut past this monologue and simply ask, "What should a person do to get to Heaven? Please tell me in one sentence." This question alone will often reveal whether someone is saved or not, and what their false hope is. It is an eye-opener! It will show you how many lost people attend your church!

What we are looking for is this: has the person come to Jesus? Has he come to Jesus because he could not get rid of his sins in any other way? Is he justified through union with the Son of God?

- c. It is *very important* for the pastor to find out what the sinner actually *thinks*. Often what the sinner says rather casually is not what he really *thinks*. One person said that he had never been to any church but the Catholic, but continually talked with Pentecostal jargon. I asked him if he had watched or heard any religious teachers on television or radio. It turned out that he had in

fact watched so-called Christian television and formed his religious opinions there. This person was properly counted as a Pentecostal rather than a Catholic. Some people, when asked how they hoped to get to Heaven, answer mechanically, "trust Jesus" or "believe in Jesus," not because they have done so or are about to do so, but because they have heard the words and repeat them back.

For this reason, the pastor must ask, "How do you hope to do that?" or "What do you mean by that (trust Jesus)?" If the sinner continues with other memorized words, repeat the question and ask him not to use the same words twice. Keep going until the sinner answers with what he really thinks.

What the sinner really thinks may be the exact opposite of what his verbal statement says. He may say "trust Jesus," or "rest in Jesus," but upon exploration he means "give every part of your life to Jesus every day," which means to become perfect - and he is unaware of the need of the Blood of Jesus to atone for his sins of the past.

Some sinners may say "I don't know" or "just believe in Jesus." Usually they are not honestly seeking the truth, but are trying to push the responsibility for their sins and their lost condition over onto the church, God, Jesus, the pastor, or someone else.

2. Unawakened sinners have no real sense of their *sin*. They may admit to having made mistakes. They often excuse their sins, blaming their own ignorance, their parents, their husbands, or someone else.

They may admit to grievous sins in the past (abortion,

drugs, sexual sin, blasphemy, etc.), but are quite detached from them now, since they are not doing them *that day*. But they should be pointed to Revelation 20:12 to explain that their sins remain on God's record in Heaven.

They may admit to sin in a general sense ("We're all sinners." "Nobody's perfect") but do not consider themselves guilty of any major crime. Often, when asked what sins they have committed, they will mention lightly sins like "pride," "missing church," "selfishness," and other so-called "minor imperfections," even though they may be guilty of horrible crimes and sins.

The emotional attitude of unawakened sinners usually reflects their spiritual state. Some will argue with the pastor, defend themselves, answer dryly as though they were in a classroom, or even laugh. The pastor must try to wake the sinner out of his slumber so he will see that he has indeed transgressed against a holy God.

3. It is the pastor's job to try to get the sinner *awakened* so that he (not only with his mouth, but in fact or "in his heart") considers himself to be.
  - (a) a guilty sinner who has broken God's laws (James 2:10; Romans 3:19-20), his sins being recorded in God's books, and thus righteously deserving of punishment (Revelation 20:12).
  - (b) a hopeless or *lost* sinner who has no way of his of his own to be saved (his false hope) and must come to *Christ* to be saved by His mercy. This is in fact what the idea of being "lost" means - not only being a sinner, but of having no way out or no hope (Luke 15:17,24,32; John 9:12; Luke 19:10; Matthew 18:11).

The pastor must thus confront the sinner with his sin and his hopelessness.

When a sinner has reached the state of awakening or conviction described here, he will be ready to come to Christ, and usually will do so rather simply (often surprisingly so).

The art of bringing a sinner to an awakened and convicted state is the work of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with the pastor. It is acquired by experience more than learned in a classroom or academic setting. To win souls requires wisdom (Prov. 11:30). Above all, it requires grace, help, and power from God, without which the best words of the worker are but empty noise.

C. The awakened/convicted sinner (Ephesians 5:14).

1. The pastor must firmly confront the sinner with the reality and greatness of his sin.

"All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die"  
(Ezekiel 18:4).

To do this, you must use God's *law*.

"By the law is the knowledge of sin"  
(Romans 3:20).

"The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

God's law is the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" of the Bible. The best known example of God's laws is the Ten Commandments. Go through the Ten Commandments and show the sinner, one by one, how he has violated God's law and is guilty, Exodus 20:4-17.

Sin is a rebellion against God.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

"Sin is the transgression (breaking) of the law" (I John 3:4).

The following describes how a sinner breaks the law and sins:

- a. God says not to do something (lie, have sex outside of marriage, curse, steal, murder) and the sinner **does it**.
- b. God says to do something (honor father and mother, come to church), and the sinner **refuses to do it**.

The greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord God with all thy heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). Every lost sinner has broken this greatest of all commandments.

The pastor must firmly confront the sinner with his sin. He must ask the sinner, "What is the biggest (or worst) sin you have done?"

Some sinners will say they have sinned in general, but are not guilty of anything in particular.

Others will lightly mention such "minor" matters as pride, selfishness, or missing church. They may even say they have "rejected Jesus," but by this they do not mean that they are guilty of the greatest sin of all, but rather that they are simply in an "un-born-again" state rather than in a born-again one, and they are ready to be born again if only someone would show them how; it is really not their fault at all. In this, they have deceived themselves, and need to be shown the truth.

None of these statements should be accepted by the pastor. Instead, try to find the person's "life sin" or "big sin" which keeps him from trusting Christ. (This is often a hatred of or rebellion against father or mother.) Such a sin may have been committed years in the past, but yet remains with the person and stains his life, his soul, and his eternal record before God.

No one is saved by stopping any sin, even the great sins of his life. But there are many people who will not be saved if they do not deal with their sin, if they are not serious about it and have every intention of going on with their sin. Actually, they have an argument with the Bible, with God and His Word. One person blurted out to me without being asked, "I think there are some things in my life that I have to change, or I can't be a Christian." The person was right.

However, change *alone* will not produce salvation. This is not a "pre-condition" for salvation. It simply means that the sinner must stop clinging to (or resting in) something else before he can rest on Jesus.

For other people, the obstacle may not be a sin but a false idea, such as the thought that their own goodness saves them, a fear that Jesus is angry with them and does not love them, or a false doctrine such as a belief that Jesus is still on the cross, or did not rise from the dead, etc. Experience will teach you how to diagnose each case.

If you cannot find the person's "great sin" in the time available, try to find *a* great sin with which you can confront the sinner. (Something like sexual sin, drugs, hatred of parents, abortion, putting family or school ahead of Jesus in importance, etc.) Perhaps this "big sin" may have been committed years in the past - but it is still on the person's record. To make that point, I often use this example:

If I killed someone and the police caught me and wanted to put me in jail - and then I said I wouldn't do it any more and threw my gun away (or repented, or confessed, or whatever words the sinner likes to use) - where would I go? Usually the sinner will answer "to jail anyway." Why? Because I've already killed a man and I am guilty of the murder I've already committed.

Well, you've already committed sin (name the sin he has committed) and you are already guilty of it before God. He didn't forget it. It is on your record. And even though it is in the past, you are still guilty of it now.

The point is to try to get the sinner to see himself for what he is: a guilty rebel who has broken God's law.

- a. Some sinners will argue with the pastor, defend themselves, make excuses for themselves, or generally resist the law of God. They may blame others or say they were ignorant. In many ways, sinners will "kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). In such a case, you should seek (by God's power and grace) to make your "face strong against their faces" and "forehead strong against their foreheads" (Ezekiel 3:8), for sinners are a "rebellious house" (Ezekiel 2:5-6; 3:9). In other words, continue to confront the sinner. Yet, even with good counselling, many sinners will "resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts 7:51). God's grace is not irresistible, and God will permit a person to reject His love in Christ if that person wills to do so.
- b. Some sinners will admit their sin, but turn to self-pity. A person may begin to cry - and only be sorry for himself. He may try to blame God: "There's nothing I can do" or "I've been given up." Do not agree with the sinner or comfort him in his

self-pity. If the sinner appears to be sad, ask him **why** he feels that way. Self pity must be distinguished from conviction of sin.

If the person is sorry for **himself** rather than guilty for sins, he is not yet ready to trust Christ.

2. The pastor must get the sinner to see that he deserves punishment.

"The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

"The wicked shall be turned into hell" (Psalm 9:17).

God is angry with the sinner's sin. While God does not hate any sinner as a person, but rather loves him, God is **consistent** and thus must reasonably punish the bad. In other words, God must punish sin, or He wouldn't be consistent with His own nature. He is therefore obligated to punish the sinner in Hell.

- a. Many unawakened sinners need to be confronted with the fact that they have sinned and are (deservedly) on the road to Hell; in fact, they are condemned already (John 3:18). Many need to read Dr. John R. Rice's booklet called "Hell: What the Bible Says About It." Many jokers and triflers need to be confronted with sin and Hell until they stop joking and laughing. Another good booklet, published by Sword of the Lord, is Jonathan Edwards' sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."
- b. Some will cry or otherwise appear sad, but will in fact be sorry for themselves, because they don't want to go to Hell (and that's all they want), or because they are not saved (and can't get back to the business of their life), or simply as a human emotion without any real reason behind it. Many sinners blame God, the church, the pastor, etc. for their state. Do not take sides with the sinner.

- c. The fact that before God (the Father) a sinner must bear his own sins, face God's wrath, and go to Hell, will help to destroy the false hope that many sinners hold of being saved by trusting **God**, believing in God, following God, etc. I tell them that if they come to God they'll be judged for their sins and God's anger (wrath) will come down upon them. Many Catholics will speak of "Jesus" or "Christ" or "Cristo" and in fact mean God the Father. Point the sinner **away** from God the Father. He needs a refuge **from** God the Father and His righteous anger; he needs to hide himself in Jesus, the "Rock of Ages, cleft for me," I Timothy 2:5; John 14:6; Romans 5:8-9.
  - d. Tempted though he may be, the pastor must not focus exclusively on Hell. Jesus did not die to save us from Hell but to forgive and pay for **sin**. As a **result** of having our sins paid for, we do not go to Hell. Furthermore, a mere desire to escape from Hell does not save. It is neither Hell nor Heaven that saves but the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the pastor should not try to put Hell in the sinner's mind by itself, but only as a means to get the sinner to see that he needs Christ. This is highly important. Sin, not Hell, is the obstacle stopping them from conversion.
3. The pastor must get the sinner to see that he is in fact **lost** in the true sense of the word, without any way out of his predicament. The sinner who is lost is one who cannot find his way home and therefore needs Jesus.

The fact is, the sinner cannot change his own nature, cannot pay for his sins, and cannot get his sins off his record before God. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8; cf. Jeremiah 13:23).

Sadly, however, sinners hide in false hopes. They may consider themselves saved, but "There is a way that

seemeth right unto a man: but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). False hopes come in several types. Here are three of them:

- a. **Actions:** following Jesus, trying to be good, cleaning up one's life, "repentance" or stopping sins, going to church, loving Jesus, keeping the Ten Commandments (but have you kept them? No? So that won't work, will it?), being baptized, "trusting Jesus day by day" which means being good minute by minute, and so on. (But how can these things pay for your past sins and get them off your record? (Titus 3:5).
- b. **Feelings/experiences:** crying over sin and confessing it (Judas did that, Matthew 27:4), feeling joy/peace/the Holy Ghost/assurance (will you feel that way tomorrow?)
- c. **Mental events:** believing Bible doctrine, **that** Jesus died and rose again for sinners (the Devil believes that too, and he's not saved. What have you got that he doesn't have, what have you done that he hasn't done?), saying the sinner's prayer (you've said it many times, it didn't work), studying the Bible, learning how to be saved (How will this pay for your sins? You must still actually **be** converted), hoping/believing that you will be saved some day (you're lost now).

The above list of false hopes is not complete. Perhaps no finite list can include all the excuses which depraved, unconverted minds can invent.

The important thing is that none of these false hopes can pay for a person's sins or wipe them off his record in Heaven. Only the Blood of Christ can do that.

**Note:** The pastor must not take too much time in explaining to the sinner **why** his false hope cannot save him. This will move the emphasis from that of

confrontation and a move towards conversion over to a theological tea party, to discuss what Machen called an "idle tale." The discussion will degenerate into a theological seminar on the technicalities of salvation. Often the sinner will turn quickly from one false hope into another.

Thus, you should not try to *teach* anything to the sinner. Hold him to the false hope he gave before. The point of exposing the false hope is not to teach him true doctrine but instead to maintain the focus and "kick out the prop" upon which the sinner leans, so as to leave him in the unhappy but real position of being a lost sinner without hope and comfort. You do not have to explain what's wrong with the false hope but rather "kick out the prop" and "keep the pressure on."

You said that you would get to Heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments. But you haven't kept them, so that doesn't work. Why, you committed adultery. What a terrible sin. And you turned your back on your mother. No, you broke the Ten Commandments. And those sins are on your record before God. Trying to be better now won't get those horrible sins off your record? Trying to keep the commandments now won't pay for those terrible, dreadful sins.

Look the sinner in the eye and keep the pressure on. Do not let him "off the hook." He will try to talk about something else. Keep the pressure on him until he either "gives up" or resists the Holy Spirit (trying to outlast you and use up the time is resisting the Holy Spirit).

4. When a sinner has "given up," he is ready to trust Jesus. The Philippian jailor said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). On the day of Pentecost people

were "pricked in their heart" and said to the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

This moment of "giving up" occurs when a sinner (seeing his sin) comes to the end of his tricks, methods, words, and false hopes, and sees himself without hope, Luke 15:17. He may actually say something like what the Philippian jailor and the Jews at Pentecost said: "But then how *can* I be saved? Or what *do* I do to be saved?" When the sinner has given up and he is not fighting any more, he is ready to be saved. Jesus was waiting with open arms all the time.

This moment is manifested in different ways with different people. Usually, however, tears do not mean the person is ready. They are often tears of self-pity or hysterical emotion. Even if the person is convicted of sin, he must move away from raw emotion and tears and turn to Jesus. Salvation is not in conviction but in Christ; conviction is a front-porch to salvation but not salvation itself. Usually the moment comes in humble seriousness without actual tears.

One person, when asked if she could or would come to Jesus, asked, "Even if you're bad?" She was saved within a few minutes.

Sometimes the emphasis is on sin rather than on the lack of a false hope: a person may be stunned by his sin and have nowhere to turn.

But sometimes the emphasis is on hopelessness. People who have tried to be saved for some time through stubbornly holding to a false hope (or one after another) may finally "give up on themselves" and think (not in a self-pitying way) that they can't or won't ever get saved. They may be surprised to hear that they can come to Christ and not be cast out (John 6:37); of course, they could have been saved before if only they had come to Christ, but they refused.

How can you recognize this moment? I have tried to give some pointers, but ***I must confess that I cannot recognize this time in every case.*** A pastor who could recognize this state in every case would have everyone converted who he "prayed with", and would never "pray with" anyone without that person being saved. ***Discerning a person's spiritual state is a gift from God and requires His help, given through prayer.***

***Note:*** Even a moment of conviction is not an end in itself! The human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9) and will invent the most subtle of excuses, such as "I'm trying to reach a moment of conviction," "I'm not humble yet," "I am broken now," "I can't seem to get my heart broken," "I can't seem to get rid of my false hopes," "This time I ***did*** get rid of my false hopes (what a wonderful thing I did)," and so on.

All these reveal an ***unawakened*** soul who is still trying to be saved by religious machinations, still trying to save himself. It is one thing to use the means of grace and ask God for conviction of sin; it is another thing to attempt to "steer your own ship" and pilot yourself into salvation so that the glory and boasting belongs not to God, but to self.

The pastor should not lose sight of the fact that Christ, Himself is the end and goal of all preaching and personal work. He, not the worker or the process, is the Saviour. Sometimes it is wise to put all analysis on the shelf and simply call the sinner to come to Christ.

#### D. The converted sinner

When a person is ready to come to Christ, the actual act of trusting Him is quite simple. After all, Jesus called little children to come unto Him. The act of trusting Jesus may seem like an anticlimax after all the mighty struggles, but we should remember that God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). Elijah witnessed a great wind,

an earthquake, and a fire, but the Lord was not in those things (I Kings 19:11-12). The Lord instead was present in a still, small voice (I Kings 19:12-13).

There are two things which I show the sinner:

1. The objective side - What must the sinner *believe*?

Jesus suffered and died in your place so that you can be forgiven. God's anger against your sins was poured out upon Jesus, on the Cross. If you trust Jesus, His Blood washes away (pays for, covers) your sins.

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6)

"He (Jesus) was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5).

"Being justified (with our sins covered, taken off our record) by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath (punishment) through him" (Romans 5:9).

The sinner must also believe that Jesus is alive, resurrected from the dead, at the right hand of God in Heaven.

"He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

"It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

"Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1-2).

Even though a person may have heard this before, it never hurts to go through the gospel again.

2. The subjective side - What must the sinner *do*?

"Believe (trust) on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

"Come unto me (Jesus said), all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The sinner must personally trust, take, receive Christ. The sinner who does this receives the objective benefits which He died to give.

After going through this, I lead the sinner in a simple "sinner's prayer." Of course, the words of the prayer are just a guide, and just saying the words will not save in itself (sometimes I tell the sinner that). But if the sinner is ready to trust Christ, the prayer can be a helpful guide.

On a general level, the prayer should be directed to Jesus, not God (I Timothy 2:5), and should include the elements of forgiveness of sin through Jesus' Blood, an act of personal trust, and the element of Jesus as a real person, resurrected from the dead, and seated at God's right hand in Heaven.

Here is the prayer I use:

"Jesus, I come to you. Wash my sin with your Blood. I come to you, Jesus. Wash my sin with your Blood. I trust you, Jesus. Wash all of my sins away with your Blood. I trust you, Jesus."

This is a simple prayer that keeps the entire focus on Jesus and His Blood. We *never* say, "I trust you *to* wash all my sins away." This easily leads to doctrinal belief rather than trusting Jesus Himself.

Trusting Christ is a special act in itself. Nothing a person does throughout his life is quite the same. It can only be done once, and only needs to be done once. But it must reflect the true inner reality of resting in and trusting in Jesus alone for salvation. The marvelous encounter, the instantaneous act of trusting Christ for salvation, has many things connected with it. For instance, when a person trusts Christ, his sins are forgiven, he receives a new nature, Christ's righteousness is imputed to him (reckoned to his account), he is adopted into God's family, and so on. Even the act itself has an active component, in that a person can choose to do it or not to do it (so it *is* something you do), although it is not a mere human work such as praying, fasting, giving up sins, dedicating oneself (so it *isn't* something you "do"), but yet the act is also passive, in that Jesus has already done all that is necessary to save and all that the sinner must do is rest in Him ("It is finished," John 19:30), and this is a "non-act" or a "non-work," a ceasing from labour and finding a simple rest in Jesus without "doing" anything other than trusting Him (John 6:29).

However, the many-faceted nature of the human encounter with Christ is something which the *pastor* can keep in mind.

It is *not* something which the *sinner* needs to keep in mind.

Trusting Christ is, for the sinner, a simple or "primitive" or "primal" act, an act "which has no parts." No one has to know *how* to do this, and the Bible never tells us *how* to trust Christ, because the Holy Spirit does this work in anyone who really wants to trust Jesus. Little children can trust Christ, and often do. The act of trusting Christ is not a noble work, not a mighty achievement of mind and will for which a person can congratulate himself. It is quite the opposite. It is receiving a free gift, a rescue, a salvation which cannot be worked out, worked up, or earned. The "how" and the details are not important.

Does a person have to meditate on "how" to jump out of a burning building?

For the sinner or the pastor to turn to the details of "how" to trust Christ is to turn the focus away from Christ Himself who is "before all things" (Colossians 2:17) and to draw the mind to human works and machinery; "I'm trying to *really* rest in Him"; "Do I focus on Jesus or just open up a door in my heart? Do I walk over to Him or picture Him coming to me?" To focus on the details of "how" is to convert the sacred gospel into the chatter of a tea party, and to excuse the Pharisee.

Nobody in the Bible who trusted Christ worried about "how" to do it, from the Philippian jailor to blind Bartimaeus to anyone else. When I trusted Jesus, I didn't think about "how." I was busy doing it. It was only a matter of seconds. Trust Jesus now and you will have all of time and eternity to meditate on the details and the consequences, to sing in Heaven and to worship the Lamb.

No, it's better to stick to the simple, old-fashioned religion. Get the sinner lost and then get him saved.

### **The Application**

A. Ask the following questions:

1. If you died tomorrow (AFTER you came and prayed today), would you go to Heaven or Hell?
  - a. If the person says, "I don't know," ask, "What do you think a person should do to get to Heaven?" If the answer is correct, see if the person has done that. But generally if a person says "Hell," or "I don't know," the person is lost.
  - b. If the person says "Heaven," move to question 2.

2. If you died and came before God and God said, "Why should I let you into Heaven," what would you say to God?

If the person says, "Because I'm a good person" or some other false hope, he is lost.

If the person says, "Because you died for me" (talking to God, remember!) or "Because I trusted you" (to God) or even "Because I trusted Him" or "Because He died for me" (meaning God), the person is lost, having confused Jesus and God the Father. Many Catholics will make this mistake.

If the person says, "Because Jesus died for me," or "Because Jesus covered my sins with His Blood," or some other correct answer, go to question 3. But be sure the person has given the name of JESUS and not "God" or "Him."

3. How would that get you into Heaven?

The idea is to see if the person understands that Jesus' Blood pays for and covers sin.

Another way to say this is in question 4.

4. What has Jesus done for you - that would get you into Heaven?

See if the person understands something of the Atonement.

5. What did YOU do to get Jesus to cover (wash, forgive) your sins?

If the person says "come to Jesus" or "trust Jesus", you can move to question 6. If the person gives a false hope, he is lost.

6. When did you do that? (It should be "just now," or whatever time you think the person might have been

saved. If the person gives some other time, he is usually lost.)

7. Have you ever done that before? (Or, have you ever come to or trusted Jesus before in the same way?)

If the person says "yes," find out what he did before. But remember that you can't be truly saved twice, so he probably has just repeated a false hope from the past.

8. How was this different from any time you did this in the past?

Try to find out if there is any difference at all. Or is this just a bunch of words he has memorized and repeated?

9. What does "that" mean to you? What do you mean by that?

Here the "that" is "come to Jesus" or "trust Jesus" or whatever the person has done to be saved (or has memorized!).

Try to get the person to say it in his own words, not just to repeat memorized "church words."

Another way you could ask is, "How would you tell me (or another person) to come to Jesus (or trust Jesus)?"

Still another way is "Just how did you do that?" Focus on the time of salvation. If the person starts to talk about his whole life story or the story of the whole long day, bring him back to the time when he prayed to come to Jesus. If he cannot say anything at all about that particular time, he is lost. He should be able to say at least a few words about the most important event of his life.

Very often when the person gets into his own words, a false hope will come out, like "I believe/trust THAT Jesus died for me (or can save me, or has saved me,

etc.)", or "I have ASKED Jesus to save me (without actually coming TO Jesus)" or "It means loving Jesus (or following Jesus, or serving Jesus)," or "It means turn from all your sins," or some other false hope.

You can test whether the person has mixed coming to Jesus with something else. If he says, "I asked Jesus to forgive me" or "I prayed to Jesus to forgive me", say, "Does everyone who asks Jesus (or prays to Jesus) to be saved, get saved?" And then, "Could a person be saved without asking Jesus to save him (or praying for it)?" Many Catholics ask Jesus to save them in the Mass, "Christ have mercy," without being saved. And yet Dr. Hymers and many others have been saved without asking anything or praying a sinner's prayer by simply looking to Christ, Isaiah 45:22. A person should know that asking and praying are not the exact same thing as coming to Jesus. Coming to Jesus is just what it says - COMING TO JESUS IS COMING TO JESUS. It is something in a class by itself, it is a special thing. It may include asking, but it is *more* than just the human act of asking. It is coming to Jesus, Himself and believing on Him.

10. If the person has answered correctly up to now, continue with:

"If you had a bad thought a year from now and then died without confessing it, would you be saved?"

(You may use some small sin in place of a bad thought, such as not saying grace once before you eat.)

If the person says "no," he is trying to save himself by the work of being perfect.

If the person says "yes," ask him why. See if he sees that Jesus died for his future sins as well as the past.

11. Then ask, "If you stopped coming to church, moved in with a prostitute and had sex with her every night for

two years, and got drunk at a bar every night for two years, and then died, WOULD YOU BE A CHRISTIAN OR NOT?" You will be surprised at how many will say, "yes," because they have in those few minutes of counselling turned the grace of God into lasciviousness.

(The idea is to give a couple of gross sins over a long period of time, which a Christian will not do.) Sadly, many think they can commit gross sins again and again without any doubt as to their salvation, although the Bible says that people who practice such sins will not go to Heaven and are not saved; I Cor. 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; I John 3:9, and other verses.

Remember to say "a Christian," not "saved." The correct answer is "no," of course - ask him why. He may think he would lose his salvation, but this doesn't necessarily mean that he should be failed in the check. The important thing is that a Christian just doesn't do this sort of sin continually.

If the person says "yes," this is the antinomian position and the person is not saved. Very often people who have memorized the answers to the other questions but without coming to Jesus and being born again will fail on this one. They have doctrinally memorized that Jesus died for sins, but don't have the reality of it in their possession!

12. If the person has answered correctly so far, he may be saved. Now test his ATTITUDE!

Ask him to come to church - not just any church or his "old" church, but the church where he got saved.

If the person says anything other than a straight "yes," he is very likely lost and has only memorized the answers. But find out why he can't promise to come to church. Maybe you can solve the problem easily and he will come. Even if he really isn't saved, the reason

he gives will shed light on his false hope and his thinking.

In some cases, there are other ways to examine the person's general attitude, but this depends on the individual person.

13. In special cases it is good to ask a question which fits the individual case of the person, to see if a genuine union with Christ has taken place:

"Can a person go to Heaven by trusting God?" ("yes" means the person trusts God, not Jesus, and is lost, John 14:6; I Timothy 2:5).

"What is Jesus like?" (Is Jesus a spirit? Is Jesus the same as God the Father? Is He angry? Is Jesus still on the cross now? Did He rise from the dead? etc.)

"Do you have to trust Jesus every second to be saved?" (Many have an idea of CONTINUALLY trusting Jesus, which is just a form of salvation by works; if they die in a bad moment when they aren't thinking about or "trusting" Jesus, they will go to Hell, or so they think.)

"Do you have to TOTALLY (or COMPLETELY, or ONE HUNDRED PERCENT, or IN TOTAL SINCERITY) trust Jesus to be saved?" (A "yes" answer may indicate salvation by works.)

"How do you know you're saved?" (The best answer is "Because the Bible says so" - John 6:37, or "Because Jesus died for me and I came to Him." If a person says "I just know", it may mean he is trusting his feelings, or it may mean he is really born again, depending on the individual case.)

"Why weren't you saved before?" "What did you do instead of trust Jesus?" (Try to see if he understands his false hope or error of the past, or at least understands his sin and neglect of God.)

Also, you may test the person's attitude about sin and right versus wrong. You can mention particular sins the person actually committed and see if he has had a change of mind (repentance) about them. Also, if the person remains in rebellion and says something like "I'm saved, you can't tell me I'm not, I'm not coming back, etc." this reveals that he has just memorized the answers without being saved (I Corinthians 2:14).

14. Finally, there is the TEST OF TIME. You can't give that test right there in the inquiry room. But tell the person who is hopefully saved that if he turns out not to be a Christian (leaves the church, or goes back to gross continual sin), he fails the test of time and reveals that he was never saved, even if he has memorized the answers to your questions, Luke 8:11-14; I John 2:19.

B. The course of a sample session:

(We have the people read a sheet titled, "Your Biggest Problem - Sin," before we speak to them)

1. Hello, my name is Dr. Cagan, what is your name?  
(the person replies).
2. What kind of church or religion did you go to in the past before you came here with us?

It is important to do this because it will give you insight into what the person very likely believes.

3. Note: some sinners, usually early in the talking, but sometimes later, will blurt out an important statement, usually something which the Holy Spirit has been showing them. One person said without being asked, "Do you think there has to be a definite day when a person trusts Jesus?" God had been bothering her about that very subject.
4. Why did you come forward today? What do you want Jesus to do for you?

Many people, although they came forward, did not do so in order to have their sins forgiven. Some have said that they want Jesus to heal them, to give them a job, to help them with a personal problem, or something other than salvation. Pray for that problem, but then explain to the person that even if the problem were solved, he would still go to Hell for his sins at death, so there is a deeper problem to deal with, his salvation.

If the person says, "to save me," or "to wash away my sins," continue to question 5.

5. If you died right now, where do you think you would go?

Does the person consider himself saved at present, or not?

6. If you died and came before God at the gate of Heaven and God asked you, "Why should I let you into Heaven?", what would you say to God?

This will give you insight into what the person's hope of salvation is. It may often be works, doctrinal belief, or some other error.

7. How would that get you into Heaven?

How does this hope of yours work?

8. (If the person thinks he is saved) When did you get saved? Tell me about that time (not the whole life story, but what happened right then, the immediate context in time). What did you *do* that got you saved, got your sins forgiven?

9. Your problem is that your sins are written in God's books. (We use a sheet with a person standing in front of God and the books open).

10. Even if you try to be good, or really become good, or go to church, or believe that Jesus exists (whatever the false hope is), that would not remove your sins from the books.
11. Only Jesus' Blood can cover your sins and wash them out of the books.
12. Where do you think Jesus *is* right now? The correct answer: in Heaven, at the right hand of God the Father. Many people think that Jesus is in the air, or already in their heart, or somewhere else. Remember that Jesus is not in the heart of any unbeliever (see Jer. 17:9) and that Satan is the prince of the power of the air. He is in the air around us, not Jesus, who is at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly place.
13. Is Jesus angry with you for your sins? Many people think He is, and then are afraid, or consider themselves unworthy, to come to Him. It is true that God is angry with sins, but Jesus died for sinners and will receive any sinner who comes to Him.  
  
(Note: for this reason, especially for those with Catholic ideas, you must emphasize that the person must come to Jesus, not to God.)
14. Sometimes (if the person has prayed before and feels no hope, or is looking for a particular set of thoughts or feelings to authenticate his salvation), I use John 6:37, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Anyone who comes to Jesus, regardless of thoughts, feelings, sins, or anything else, will be received and forgiven by Jesus.
15. If you come to Jesus and trust Him today, His Blood will cover your sins. And God won't see your sins, won't judge you for them.
16. Will you do that now? If the person seems to be

awakened, pray with him. Sometimes I say, "The prayer itself is just a guide. The important thing is to come to Jesus during this time." Sometimes I say, "Remember, come to Jesus, not to God." (Coming to God and not Jesus will get the person burned in fire!) This shows the absolute importance of Jesus' mediatorial work, John 14:6. I also tell them that Jesus is alive, seated at the right hand of God in Heaven (Mark 16:19; Colossians 3:1; I Peter 3:22). People need to know where Jesus is or they cannot come to Him in any real sense.

17. Then I give the person a chance to rest in another room and check the person in a few minutes. (Or sometimes I check the person immediately.) If the person has made an error, correct it and pray with the person again, unless he or she is unawakened. (Those who make the same error again and again are almost always unconcerned, not paying attention.) I usually give them something to read, such as Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," or John R. Rice's "Crossing the Deadline." Then I send them home to read it and ask them to come and see me again after hearing the next sermon in church.

With these methods, I hope and pray that many more people will be truly converted and go on to live productive Christian lives. Love the people enough to spend time with them and help them find salvation through Jesus. This is our highest calling as winners of lost souls. It is this kind of love that may well pave the way for God to send true revival to our churches one more time.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, "Conversion As Our Aim," from *Lectures To My Students* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1889), quoted in *Encounter With Spurgeon* by Helmut Thielicke (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), pp. 60-61.

<sup>2</sup>F. L. Chapell, *The Great Awakening of 1740* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1903), p. 133.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989, reprinted from the 1656 edition), pp. 94-97.

<sup>4</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923, reprinted 1983), p. 66.

<sup>5</sup>Brian H. Edwards, *Revival! A People Saturated With God* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1991), p. 108.

<sup>6</sup>Brian H. Edwards, p. 254.

<sup>7</sup>Brian H. Edwards, p. 275.

<sup>8</sup>Asahel Nettleton, *Sermons from the Second Great Awakening*, (International Outreach: Ames, Iowa, 1995 reprint), pp. 166-167.

<sup>9</sup>John R. Rice, *Why Preach Against Sin?* (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord, 1946), pp. 17-20.

<sup>10</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989, reprinted from the 1656 edition), pp. 94-97.

<sup>12</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, "The Warrant of Faith," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, volume 9 (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1979), p. 530.

<sup>13</sup>A. T. Pierson, *The Bible and Spiritual Life* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1908), p. 238; quoted in Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 359.

<sup>14</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, "The Warrant of Faith," p. 530.

<sup>15</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923, reprinted 1983), p. 66.

<sup>16</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *Around the Wicket Gate* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications), p. 57.