

# GOD HAS A WONDERFUL PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

by Ray Comfort

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*Comfort's contemporary Christian work examining the reality of God's personal plan and purpose for individual believers, challenging common assumptions about evangelistic messaging and calling readers to a deeper understanding of the gospel and God's will for their lives.*

9 Chapters

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## God Has A Wonderful Plan For Your Life

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## Chapter 1

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God has a wonderful plan for your life. Contents, Chapter 1, Phenomenal Growth. Chapter 2, The Way Out of Problems.

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We live in exciting times. All around us we're seeing signs of the end of the age. The Jews are back in Jerusalem, and the city has become a burdensome stone to the nations.

At the same time, we have seen the phenomenal rise of megachurches, with congregations in the tens of thousands. Pockets of revival have sprung up in the United States and other parts of the world. We've heard of millions of people in Russia, China and Africa coming to the Saviour.

For example, one evangelist claims that his worldwide tour has led nearly one million people to make decisions for Christ since 2007. The denomination reported nearly 2.5 million decisions for Christ in 2008. One international organization reported over 10 million decisions for Christ in 2009.

And another states that over 20 million people have made decisions for Christ as a result of the ministry over the years. These are indeed exciting times. Yet with all the excitement about the growth of the contemporary church, it seems that many have overlooked a few statistical inconsistencies.

An October 2003 survey conducted by the Barna Group found that 45% of those who professed to be born-again Christians believed that gambling was morally acceptable. According to the survey, 49% believed that living with someone of the opposite sex without being married was morally okay. Just under half of those questioned, 49%, were comfortable with enjoying sexual thoughts or fantasies about someone, while one third, 33%, thought it was okay to kill a baby while it's still in the womb.

In 2001, a survey conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute in New York found that 13% of abortion patients described themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians. That is, of all those who actually murdered their own unborn children, nearly one in eight professed faith in Jesus Christ. It's difficult to reconcile with the fact that Christians are supposed to love God and love others as much as they love themselves.

Additionally, according to an article titled Porn Nation in World Magazine, of the men belonging to the Christian organization Promise Keepers, who make a promise to be, quote, committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity, 53% visit porn sites every week. This alarming finding is not confined to the pews. An internet survey of 6,000 pastors conducted in 2002 found that 30% of pastors had viewed internet porn in the last 30 days.

This is despite the fact that these men are to be the spiritual leaders of their flocks and their families. In 2009, the Barna Group found further evidence that all is not well in contemporary church. Quote, among individuals who describe themselves as Christian, for instance, close to half believe that Satan does not exist.

One third contend that Jesus sinned while he's on the earth. Two fifths say they do not have responsibility to share the Christian faith with others. And one quarter dismiss the idea that the Bible is accurate in all the principles it teaches, end of quote.

Think for a moment. Think of the implications of such theology. Here we have millions of believers who supposedly confess that Jesus is Lord, yet they think he sinned.

They either don't know what the Bible teaches about the Son of God, or they believe it's inaccurate when it says that Jesus knew no sin, that he was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin, and that he committed no sin nor was deceit found in his mouth. Furthermore, if Jesus sinned, it would mean that he wasn't the spotless Lamb of God the scriptures say he was, that a sacrifice wasn't perfect, and that when God accepted Jesus' death as atonement for our sins, he sanctioned a contaminated payment and is therefore corrupt by nature. Sadly, the multitudes who profess faith in Jesus yet deny his sinless perfection appear to be strangers to true regeneration.

The Jesus they believe in isn't capable of saving anyone. In addition, 41% of self-proclaimed Christians believe that, quote, the Bible, the Quran, and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths, end of quote. This is despite the book's vastly contradictory teachings on truth, salvation, and the nature of God.

And only 46% of born-again adults believe in the existence of absolute moral truth. So the other 54% don't think that God is moral absolutes, which explains why so many live their lives as though there was no moral accountability at all. Pulser George Barna, in observing these troubled trends, noted, quote, although most Americans consider themselves to be Christian and say they know the content of the Bible, less than one out of ten Americans demonstrate such knowledge through their actions, end of quote.

With over 173 million Christians in the US, there are tens of millions who say that they love God and yet they're liars, thieves, fornicators, adulterers, and child murderers. Paul's warning to Titus seems to be true of much of the modern church. Quote, they profess to know God, but in works they deny him.

Neither their belief nor their behavior aligns with biblical Christianity. Leaving in droves. Sadly, young people today are exhibiting the same theological confusion as the preceding generation.

Despite eight out of ten teens describing themselves as Christian, 61% believe a place in heaven can be earned through good works, 63% believe Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, and all other people pray to the same God, and 58% believe all religious faiths teach equally valid truths. As with adults, the behavior of youth who describe themselves as Christians is virtually indistinguishable from that of non-Christians. An Ethics of America youth survey found that in the prior 12 months, 74% of Christian teens cheated on a test, 93% lied to a parent, and 63% physically hurt someone when angered.

The Barner group also found that teens who profess to be born again and attend church regularly were just as likely as secular teens to engage in internet theft of music and to illegally copy CDs. In a joint statement, youth specialists Josh McDowell and Ron Luce made a sobering announcement. They said, While this is a shocking omission, McDowell and Luce are not alone in their conclusion.

98% of youth ministers and pastors McDowell surveyed agree to that assessment. If that isn't alarming enough, another trend is helping to further paint a bleak picture of the state of the American church. In researching families in the US, the Southern Baptist Council on Family Life discovered a gut-wrenching statistic.

Quote, 88% of children raised in evangelical homes leave church at the age of 18, never to return. This mass exodus is seen not just among Southern Baptist churches, but across denominational lines. Youth Transition Network reports when kids go to university, 70% walk away from the faith.

An interview in a popular national radio program, a Christian youth leader, spoke with great concern about how many people were, leaving the church in droves. He had taken a survey to find out why these teenagers were turning their backs on God, and he cited the number one reason as, quote, a lack of opportunity in the church, end of quote, implying that the church should get its act together and give young people more opportunities. Ask any pastor if there are opportunities to serve within his church, and he'll no doubt tell you there is a lack of people willing to teach Sunday school, visit the sick and the elderly, go out with the evangelism team, clean the church building, etc.

Perhaps there's another reason why young people are leaving the church in droves. As these statistics show, there are many today who name the name of Christ, but who have failed to depart from iniquity. They are false converts who have, asked Jesus into their hearts, but are actually unconverted because they have never truly repented.

I can't put into words the heartbreak of seeing so many spurious converts who have left the church, and multitudes of false converts who stay within the church. Prolific author and pastor A.W. Tozer writes, It is my opinion that tens of thousands of people, if not millions, have been brought into some sort of religious experience by accepting Christ, and they have not been saved. Tozer is not alone in his conclusion.

The late pastor D. James Kennedy of Coleridge Ministries had a similar observation. He said, The vast majority of people who are members of churches in America today are not Christians. I say that without the slightest fear of contradiction.

I base it on empirical evidence of 24 years of examining thousands of people. How could this tragic situation have happened? How could vast numbers of people have been led to believe they're Christians when they're not? If you have struggled to understand why a loved one who has made a decision for Christ has no desire for the things of God, or why so many church members show little or no evidence for their faith, there is an explanation. And there is something you can do to change the situation.

The parabolic key. Though the idea of false conversions may be new to us, the problem of false converts has existed since the beginning of the church, and is actually a topic Jesus spoke often

about. For example, in Mark 4, 3-8, Jesus taught the crowd the well-known parable of the sower.

This is what he said, Listen, behold, a sower went out to sow, and it happened as he sowed that some seed fell by the wayside, and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth, and immediately sprang up, because there was no depth of earth. But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and because it had no root, it withered away.

And some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground, and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased, and produced some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred. When Jesus told his disciples the parable of the sower, they did not understand what it meant.

When they asked him about it later, he said, Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all parables? In other words, if they could comprehend the parable of the sower, they would hold the key to unlock the mystery of all the other parables. If there is one message that comes from the parable about the stony ground, the thorny ground, and the good ground, it is this. When the gospel is preached, there will be true and false conversions.

Judas Iscariot, for example, was a false convert. He was a hypocrite, a pretender, whose desire, it seems, for riches and power choked out his affection for Christ. In terms of the parable, we would say that he was a thorny ground hearer, in whom the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Judas had no idea who Jesus really was. When a woman anointed Jesus with an expensive ointment in an act of sacrificial worship, Judas complained that the ointment should have been sold in the money given to the poor. In his estimation, Jesus of Nazareth wasn't worth such extravagance.

He was worth only about 30 pieces of silver. Moreover, the Bible tells us that Judas was lying when he said that he cared for the poor. He was actually a thief, who so lacked a healthy fear of God that he was stealing money from the collection bag.

Nevertheless, to all outward appearances, Judas was a follower and a disciple of Christ. If one grasps the principle that true and false converts will be alongside each other in the church, then all the other parables about the kingdom of God also make sense. The wheat and the tares, the good fish and the bad fish, the wise virgins and the foolish virgins, the sheep and the goats.

Take, for example, the parable of the dragnet. This is from Matthew 13. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which when it was full, they drew to the shore, and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels and threw the bad away.

Saul will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. They'll be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Notice that the good fish and the bad fish were in the net together. Notice also that unbelievers are not caught in the dragnet of the kingdom of God. They remain in the world.

The fish that are caught are those who hear and respond to the gospel, the evangelistic catch. They remain together, the true and the false, until the day of judgment. In Matthew 7.21, possibly the most frightening passage in scripture, Jesus spoke of many who would consider themselves Christians and yet not be saved.

Jesus warned, quote, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Cast out demons in your name and done many wonderful works in your name. Then will I profess to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. End of quote. Look at how seemingly spiritual people can be and still not make it to heaven.

They called Jesus Lord. They prophesied in his name. They cast out demons.

They did many wonders in his name. These people are more spiritual than most of us and yet they'll be rejected by the one they call Lord. False converts do have a measure of spirituality.

Judas certainly did. He had apparently convinced the other disciples that he truly cared for the poor and he seemed so trustworthy that he was the one who looked after the finances. And when Jesus said, one of you will betray me, the disciples didn't point the finger at Judas.

Instead, they suspected themselves saying, Lord, is it I? That's why it's not surprising that so few within the body of Christ today would suspect that we're surrounded by those who fall into the Judas category. However, alarm should go off when we look at statistics such as those we cited in this chapter. Something is radically wrong.

However, before we look at the remedy, we must consider the cause.

## Chapter 2

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Chapter 2. The way out of problems. In the light of the alarming statistics cited in the previous chapter, few would deny that the church as a whole has fallen short of the powerful, disciplined, sanctified church we see in the book of Acts. This has happened because the Enemy has very subtly diverted our attention away from our core message.

Instead of preaching the good news that sinners can be made righteous in Christ and escape the wrath to come, we have settled for a gospel that implies that God's primary purpose in saving us is to unfold a wonderful plan for our lives to solve our problems, make us happy in Christ, and rescue us from the hassles of this life. One of America's largest Christian publishers produces a full-color tract that epitomizes the promise of a hassle-free life. Titled, *Is There a Way Out?*, it reads, Everyone is looking for a way out of their problems.

There's no easy way out. You won't get respect by joining a gang. You won't find love in the backseat of a car.

You'll never find success by dropping out of school. And the chances are about one in a million that you'll win the lottery. If you're really serious about making your life better, then try God's way.

God gets right to the source of most of our problems—sin. It may sound admirable and even biblical to imply to sinners that Christianity promises to solve their problems and make their lives better, but it's just not true. In another publication, a list of pleasure-producing things is cited—sex, money, friends, fame, love, and so on.

The question is posed, can we be truly and continually happy? The answer, provided, is, of course, that knowing Jesus produces, quote, ultimate happiness, your happiest moment magnified a million times over, end of quote. It seems that some are so entrenched in the wonderful plan message that they don't equate real life with the message they preach. Based on many years of itinerant ministry, I know that it's no exaggeration to say the following scenario is commonplace in many pulpits each Sunday morning, quote, God has a wonderful plan for your life.

He wants to give you true happiness and to fill the God-shaped vacuum in your heart that you've been trying to fill with sex, drugs, alcohol, and money. Jesus said that he came to give you life and that you might have it more abundantly. So come forward now and give your life to Jesus so that you can experience this wonderful new life in Christ.

While they're coming, let's pray for the Smiths who lost their two children in a car accident this week. Brother Jones is being diagnosed with cancer. Remember to uphold the whole family.

His wife had another miscarriage on Tuesday and both of the children are chronic asthmatics. Sister Bryant fell and broke her hip. She's such a dear saint.

She's had trial after trial in her life, especially since the death of her husband Ernie. Elder Chambers lost his job this week. That'll make things difficult for the Chambers family, especially

with his upcoming triple bypass operation.

Sister Lansing died of kidney failure on Monday night. Keep the Lansing family in prayer because it's their third tragedy this year. How many of you this morning need prayer for sickness and have problems with depression? Oh, that many.

You better stay in your seats or I'll have corporate prayer. This makes no sense. The preacher promises a bed of roses to those who come to Christ, but those who are in Christ are evidently sitting on a painful bed of thorns.

He promises a smooth flight, but those who are already on board are suffering terrible turbulence, and no one seems to notice the paradox. Let me tell you about a few of my friends, my Christian friends who live in the real world. One went with his wife to a meeting.

Their teenage son drove there alone. On the way home, my friend came across an accident, so he stopped to help. When he looked into the vehicle, he saw his beloved teenage son dead and pale on the steering wheel.

The senior pastor of a church who was on staff was roused from his bed at three o'clock in the morning to counsel a man who had come to his door and was waiting in the living room. As the pastor stepped into the room, the man began to slash him with a machete. The pastor almost died and was irrevocably scarred, both physically and mentally, so much so that he was unable to minister and required 24-hour care.

Another pastor friend learned that his wife had multiple sclerosis. The crippling disease left him as the only one in the family able to take care of their three young boys. Then he was diagnosed with cancer.

His wife died after struggling with the disease for many years. One of my friends, a graphic artist, married a woman whose Christian husband had died of cancer, leaving her to rear five kids. The marriage seemed fine until she ran off with another man.

She left my friend with one child that was his. Sometime after that, someone broke into his home and beat him to a pulp. He had to be rushed to the emergency room for treatment.

On June the 19th, 2000, five trainees with the New Tribes Mission pitched a tent during a violent storm in Mississippi. Jenny Knapp, an attractive 20-year-old, noticed that rain was causing the roof to cave in, so she lifted the tent pole to raise the height of the roof. Suddenly, a bolt of lightning struck the pole and tore through her body, giving her second-degree burns on her face, arm, and back.

Her friends resuscitated her lifeless body and rushed her to the hospital, where she was placed in the intensive care unit. The young missionary recovered, but she's terribly scarred and partially blind. It's a sad fact of life, but in the real world, lightning strikes the just and the unjust.

At least one church I know of may have noticed the paradox. They were called the Happy Church, but recently decided, for some reason, to change their name. The wonderfulness of martyrdom.

If we still want to cling to the message that God has a wonderful plan for your life, we'd better hide Fox's book of martyrs from the eyes of non-Christians. Speaking of martyrdom, have you ever

wondered what it would be like to be huddled together with your family in a Roman arena as hungry and ferocious lions rush in? Have you ever considered what it would be like to be eaten by lions? I have. My fertile imagination runs wild.

What do you give the lion first? Your arm? How long would you remain conscious as he gnawed on it? Can you imagine the feelings you'd have if you had led your loved ones in a sinner's prayer using the wonderful plan hook? Suppose you had read to them from a booklet by a well-known and respected man of God in which he writes, everyone is seeking happiness. Why then are more people not experiencing this happiness? According to the Bible, true happiness can be found only through God's way. What would you tell your beloved family as you looked into their terrified eyes? How could you reconcile the words wonderful and happiness with having the fierce teeth of a lion rip you apart limb from limb? These are terrible thoughts, but they're not merely my fantasies.

Multitudes of martyrs have suffered unspeakable torture for the cause of Christ. It should not have been a surprise to the early church when persecution hit them. Jesus warned them that they may have to give up their lives for his namesake.

He even said, brother shall deliver brother up to death, and a father his child and children will rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death. And you'll be hated by all for my namesake. That's in Matthew 10.

Church tradition tells us the fate of several apostles and early evangelists. Philip crucified, Phrygia AD 54. Matthew beheaded, Ethiopia AD 60.

Barnabas burned to death, Cyprus AD 64. Mark dragged to death, Alexandria AD 64. James the Less clubbed to death, Jerusalem AD 66.

Paul beheaded, Rome AD 66. Peter crucified, Rome AD 69. Andrew crucified, Achaia AD 70.

Thomas speared to death, Calamina AD 70. Luke hanged, Athens AD 93. Persecution has always been the portion of the godly.

According to scripture, others were tortured. Still others had trial of mockings and scourging. Yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned. They were sown in two, were tempted, were slain with a sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world is not worthy.

They wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth. Hebrews 10 35 to 38. Perhaps some would argue that the Christian life is a wonderful plan because all things work together for good to those that love God.

Romans 8 28. That fact is wonderful in the truest sense of the word. No matter what happens to us as Christians, we can rejoice because of that promise.

But the promise does not guarantee that our lives will be without suffering, trial and pain. In 14 13, John Hus was summoned to appear before the Roman church council in Constance. When he was thrown in prison for 19 months awaiting trial for his faith and then sentenced to death, he no doubt knew that God would work things out for his good.

When he was burned alive at the stake and his charred lifeless body fell among the ashes, the wonderful promise that God would work out for his good such an unspeakable horror remained unwavering. On November the 9th 2006, three Christian girls were beheaded by Indonesian militants. The severed heads were dumped in plastic bags in their village along with a handwritten note threatening more such attacks.

If these girls love God and were caught according to his purpose, they too could claim this incredible promise. In Malatia, Turkey, when three Christian men working in a Bible publishing office were accosted by Muslims on April the 18th 2007, they no doubt knew that God would work all things together for their good. As their hands and feet were bound and they were tortured for two hours with butcher knives, the finally of the throats were cut.

The promise remained steadfast. According to Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in 2006, an average of 171,000 Christians worldwide are martyred for their faith each year. The promise of Romans 8 28 is also true for each and every one of those children of God.

If indeed our creator works all things out for good, if he brings ultimate good out of every agony suffered by his children, why then shouldn't we use that truth as bait when fishing for men? For one thing the wonderful plan has positive connotations. It doesn't typically invoke negative images of machetes, hatred, persecution, beatings and martyrdom. If non-Christians respond to the gospel message only to improve their lives, they'll be disillusioned when persecution comes.

They may even fall away from the faith. This is because many respond experimentally simply to see if the wonderful life is as good as Christians say it is. But the most important reason not to use the wonderful plan message is that it isn't biblical to do so.

Go through the book of Acts and see if you can find any of the disciples telling sinners either that God loved them or that he had a wonderful plan for their lives. Instead they confronted their heroes as guilty criminals, enemies of God who desperately needed righteousness, not to be told that they could enhance their lives with God's wonderful plan. Jesus didn't shield the newly converted soul of Tarsus from that which was in store for him as a Christian.

Instead Jesus said that he would quote show him how many things he must suffer for my namesake. Stephen was cruelly stoned to death for his faith. James who told his brethren to count it all joy when you fall into furious trials was murdered with a sword.

John the Baptist also felt the sharp steel of persecution. Down through the ages Christians have been hated, persecuted, thrown to lions, beheaded and like John Hus even burned at the stake for the sake of the gospel. In the light of the fact that in February 2000 Christians in Central Africa were being burned to death for their faith and Christians in Indonesia and China are yet today suffering persecution for their faith, perhaps the message that God has a wonderful plan for your life applies only to the United States.

One might have offered that argument until the shooting death of Cassie Burnell and other Christians in Littleton Colorado on April the 20th 1999. It was reported that Cassie was shot in the head when she answered yes to the question do you believe in God? Not so wonderful. If you still want to hold on to the modern approach to evangelism let me try one other thought that should convince you that the wonderful plan message is erroneous and misleading.

Imagine that you've been supernaturally taken back to September the 10th 2001. You've been asked to address the people who work in tower one of the World Trade Center. Your topic is quote the benefits of the Christian life.

What an incredible opportunity you have to reach the lost. You look at the vast sea of faces in front of you. There are mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sons and daughters.

Many have already made retirement plans. Others have made plans to be with their families for Christmas. Just like you they have hopes dreams and fears.

What are you going to tell them? Are you going to tell them what a wonderful plan God has for them? How could you do that? You know that within 24 hours many of your hearers will die in unspeakably horrible ways. In an instant some will become human torches as jet fuel saturates them and their bodies ignite and burn to ashes. Others will be terribly suffocated in a huge ball of fiery poisonous gases as their burning lungs grasp for breath.

Rather than face the horror of dying in the flames some will jump more than a hundred stories in inconceivable terror to their deaths on the unforgiving sidewalks of New York City. Those who manage to stay alive on the upper floors will eventually come crashing down along with the earth-shaking weight of twisted metal and concrete. Their bodies so horribly mangled and ripped apart they'll be unidentifiable.

Many others working on the lower towers will be crushed like helpless spiders as the building collapses. Again what will you tell them? Can you in good conscience say God has a wonderful plan for your life? You may be thinking, hold on, God does have a wonderful plan for their lives for their eternity. You believe that if they give their lives to Christ they will go to heaven after they've been burned to death or smashed on the sidewalk.

But sinners don't equate the promise of a wonderful plan for your life with eternity. They think of the here and now. I would say that I could never tell those people that God has a wonderful plan for their lives and I trust you feel the same.

The reality is that every 24 hours 150,000 people around the world die and enter eternity. Most without the Savior. Every year in the United States alone 562,340 people die of cancer.

That's 1,500 every day and 40,000 annually die through car accidents. According to the CDC around 36,000 people die in the U.S. each year from seasonal flu. More than 2,500 Americans die from heart disease every day and 100,000 are helped out of here through hospital related infections, that is dirty hospitals.

If the dirty hospitals don't get you incompetence may take you out. Between 40,000 and 100,000 people die every year because of doctors mistakes including surgical mishaps and drug mix-ups. We never know when death will seize upon someone so if that popular message isn't appropriate for the people who worked in the World Trade Center or for those with terminal diseases, those who will soon be killed through accidents or violence, those who'll be facing suffering in this life and so on, how then can it be the biblical gospel? The gospel message recorded in scripture transcends time, space and circumstances.

It's the same message for all mankind throughout history. Perhaps you're thinking this guy is destroying my gospel presentation. Now what am I going to tell non-Christians? What would bring someone to the Savior if it's not the promise of a wonderful new life in Christ? If that's your view, please be patient with me.

We will answer these questions in a subsequent chapter. But before we look at the biblical approach, we'll first consider some additional concerns with using the wonderful plan message.

## Chapter 3

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Chapter 3, The Happiness Dilemma As we've seen, telling people that God has a wonderful plan for their lives isn't being honest about the realities of life. And here is the double tragedy. When the Church declares the message that Jesus solves problems or Jesus provides happiness, it restricts the feel of evangelistic endeavour to those in society who will be interested.

Those who are unhappy and caught up in their problems. These problem people are not given the message of sin, righteousness and judgement with the command to repent and flee from wrath to come. Instead, they're told that Jesus is the answer to their alcohol, drug, marriage, personal or financial problems.

That he's the one who can fill the God-shaped hole in their lives. Many, therefore, come only to have their problems solved. However, if they do not repent of their sin because they haven't been told to, they'll have a false conversion and they'll not become new creatures in Christ.

Though they may call Jesus Lord, they'll continue to practice lawlessness. Consequently, they'll bring their sins and their problems into the local church, which has the following unfortunate effects. Wearing out the pastors.

Instead of being unable to give themselves fully to feeding the flock of God and the capacity of a shepherd, pastors find themselves forever counselling those who are only hearers of the word and not doers. Tying up labourers, who are already fewer in number, by having them spend their precious time propping people up when these problem people really need repentance and hindering the furtherance of the gospel. Probably the biggest stumbling blocks for unbelievers is what they see as rampant hypocrisy within the Church.

In a publication titled, *What Do You Want From Life?* the conclusion is drawn that we all want to be happy. Despite the list of things cited, sex, money, friends, fame, love and so on, the question is posed, can we be truly and continually happy? The answer provided is, of course, that knowing Jesus produces, quote, ultra happiness, your happiest moment magnified a million times over. Not many would see that there is anything wrong with this publication.

However, the call of the gospel is universal and is not confined to the unhappy, hurting world, as is often promoted. The gospel is a promise of righteousness, not a promise of happiness, and it therefore may also be offered to those who are enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. Prior to my conversion, I was very happy, satisfied, thankful and joyful.

At the age of 20, I was a successful businessman with my own house, a beautiful wife, a car, money and being self-employed, the freedom to enjoy it all. I was loving life and living it to the fullest. Therefore, I was not a candidate for the modern gospel.

I wasn't hurting in the slightest. I had a wonderful life without Jesus. However, when I was confronted with the biblical gospel and understood that riches profit not on the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death, I saw my need of the Savior.

Let me repeat. Because of the erroneous belief that the chief end of the gospel is man's happiness on earth rather than righteousness, many fail to see its God-given intent. They think that the gospel is only for those who lack money, those who are brokenhearted by life's difficulties, those who are the problem people in society.

The belief is further perpetuated through the popular worship choruses that have splendid melodies that carry this message. Heartaches, broken people, ruined lives are why you died on Calvary. How often do we therefore neglect to share the gospel with those whose lives are going well because we know they won't be interested in the wonderful planned message.

We may wait for a crisis to come their way or in fact secretly hope that it does so their heartaches will make them then receptive to our offer of a better life. Who is the gospel for? We limit our evangelistic outreaches when we build them as taking the good news to the hurting and the needy. Let me further illustrate this common misunderstanding by quoting from another modern publication.

Quote, you'll desire to be where the Lord is and he spends his time with those who hurt. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus quoted Isaiah to describe the work he was called to do. The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he's anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.

He sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, Luke 4, 18-19. Thus the more you go after God the deeper you'll move into a world filled with hurting people. End of quote.

I'm in no way questioning the sincerity of the author but I believe he perpetuates a common misunderstanding of what Jesus intended to communicate when he quoted Isaiah 61, 1 and 2. We live in a therapeutic culture that places a high value on feeling good, self-esteem and self-actualization. Consequently, when we see words like poor, brokenhearted and oppressed, we think of people who are beset by life circumstances, whether it's poverty, divorce, addiction or disease. Jesus, however, is speaking primarily in spiritual terms.

From Luke 4, 18-19 here is Jesus' summation of those who the gospel is for. The poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind, the oppressed. When Jesus speaks of the poor, he's not necessarily referring to those who lack financial resources.

Instead, he's referring to the poor in spirit, Matthew 5, 3. Those who are meek, humble, lowly. These are the blessed ones to whom the kingdom of God belongs. Those who know that they're destitute of righteousness.

In his commentary on Luke 4, 14-30, Matthew Henry writes, quote, Observe to whom he was to preach, to the poor, to those who were the poor in this world, whom the Jewish doctors disdained to undertake the teachings of and spoke of with contempt, to those that were poor in spirit, to the meek and humble, to those that were truly sorrowful for sin, end of quote. When Jesus speaks of the brokenhearted, he doesn't mean those unhappy people whose hearts are aching because they've been jilted by a sweetheart, but those who, like Peter and Isaiah, are contrite and sorrowing for their sin. In David's great prayer of confession, he realized that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart.

Psalm 51, verse 17. In the words of Matthew Henry, Christ was sent to heal the brokenhearted, to give peace to those who were troubled and humbled for sins, to bring them to rest who were weary and heavy laden under the burden of guilt and corruption. The captors are those taken captive by the devil to do his will, 2 Timothy 2, 26.

The blind are those whom the God of this age has blinded to the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, 2 Corinthians 4, 4. The oppressed are those who are oppressed by the devil, Acts 10, 38. In other words, Jesus came to preach the good news of God's forgiveness to those who recognize their spiritual poverty and are broken by the realization that they have sinned against a just and holy God. That isn't to say that Jesus did not minister to those who were beset by life's circumstances, but his message was not only for those people, and the freedom he offered was not freedom from the hardships of life.

Again, the gospel is not confined to the hurting people with ruined lives and heartaches. Both hurting and happy people need to be shown their sinful state before God so that they'll seek after the righteousness that's in Christ. One atheist, understandably confused by the life enhancement message, observed, quote, at one church I visited, some people were asked to write down how they felt before and after becoming Christian.

They said things like dark and light, lonely and befriended, which got me wondering, was being down or lonely or desperate a prerequisite for finding God? Did these people think that others who had not yet found God were lost, scared or miserable? Do I have to go through some sort of trauma or crisis before finding some ultimate meaning? End of quote. The competition. Another dilemma with the life enhancement message is this.

If you search the internet using the keywords true happiness, you'll find many websites offering Jesus as a solution. However, the idea that Jesus gives true happiness has some competition. There are more than a hundred million other results to the keywords true happiness, many of which refer to self-help strategies, such as that proposed by author Martin E.P. Segerman on authentic happiness, using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment.

The Jehovah's Witnesses believe they have the answer for happiness. Their Watchtower magazine states, through a study of the Bible, you can find true happiness despite your problems. Jehovah's Witnesses will be pleased to show you the scriptural answers that you need to know if you are to be truly happy.

End of quote. Buddhism likewise claims to be the path to true happiness, as the basic Buddhism guide assures us. Quote, Buddhism explains a purpose to life.

It explains apparent injustice and inadequacy around the world and provides a code of practice or way of life that leads to true happiness. Hinduism offers the same thing. Without remembering the name of God, even the sovereign king of the world, we would be unhappy.

By dwelling on the name of God, he can obtain true happiness. Hence, realization of God is the key that unlocks the doors to unending happiness, eternal peace of mind, and unimaginable bliss. So does Islam.

In a lecture delivered in Washington by Mahala Shah Muhammad al-Din al-Qadiri, expounded on, quote, the quest for true happiness, he said, Here I shall state some basic facts and the principles pertaining thereunto, so that if anyone practices them, he or she may attain peace of mind, comfort of the soul, and true happiness. In December 2007, a Gallup poll asked Americans how satisfied they were with their personal lives. 52% responded that they were very happy, and another 40% said that they were fairly happy.

So the modern gospel has some stiff competition. The vast majority of people in the United States are already enjoying a wonderful plan for their lives, and they're quite happy as they are. For any who feel something is missing and look to religion for happiness, they'll find a smorgasbord of choices all offering to improve their lives on earth.

If only Jesus gives true happiness, as the modern gospel message maintains, then it follows that the happiness the world gives must be false, or at least very shallow. Consequently, the Christian sees his job as one of unmasking the world's promise of happiness and contrasting it with the true and lasting happiness that Jesus gives. From there arises the, quote, Jesus is better than beer mentality.

This is demeaning to the name of Jesus and completely unnecessary. There is no contest between Jesus and beer, because happiness isn't the issue. The abundant life.

Still, the question may arise, why not use the fact that Jesus said that he had come to bring us an abundant life, John 10.10, to draw unregenerate sinners to the Savior? True, the Christian life is full. Consider the full life of the apostle Paul. Read 2 Corinthians 11.23-28 and see if you think he was bored while being stoned once, shipwrecked three times, beaten three times, and whipped five times.

His life was full. There are also times when he wasn't happy. In fact, at one point he was in such despair that he wanted to die.

See 2 Corinthians 1.8. The apostle gives the carnal-minded Corinthians a glimpse of the abundant life. He told them that he had been condemned to death. He was hungry and thirsty.

He lacked clothing. He was beaten and had nowhere to live. He was reviled, persecuted, slandered, and treated as the filth of the world.

What a terrible, uninviting path Paul walked down. If happiness were the goal, one would think that he would put up a sign saying, Don't enter here. However, he did the opposite.

He told the Corinthians to imitate him. See 1 Corinthians 4.9-16. He considered the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared to the life in eternity. Like Jesus, the apostle Paul taught that the Christian life is one of self-denial.

We are to crucify the flesh, daily take up the cross, and deny ourselves and follow Jesus. However, the wonderful plan message, with its promise of earthly happiness, appeals solely to the hearer's selfishness. By offering a problem-free life, it encourages continued love of self rather than of God, and paints him as a divine butler.

Where is God's love? If we can't give sinners the message that God has a wonderful plan for their lives, how can we tell them about God's love? As we have seen, the apostle Paul faced countless trials and tribulations, was mocked and hated, imprisoned for years, and finally martyred. What did he look to for assurance of God's love for him? He didn't look to his lifestyle, because to the untrained eye, it didn't exactly speak of God's caring hand for him. His abundant life was certainly full, but it wasn't full of what we might expect if God loved him.

Picture Paul lying half-naked on a cold dungeon floor, chained to hardened Roman guards. You look at his bloody back and his bruised, swollen face, and you say, Paul, you've been beaten again. Where are your friends? Demas and the others have forsaken you.

Where is your expensive chariot and your successful building program? Where is the evidence of God's blessing, Paul? What's that? What did you say? Did I hear you mumble through swollen lips that God loves you? Now picture Paul slowly lifting his head. His black and bruised eyes look deeply into yours. They sparkle as he says two words, The Cross! He painfully reaches into his blood-soaked tunic, and carefully pulls out a letter that he had been writing.

His trembling and blood-stained fingers point to one sentence. You strain your eyes in the dim light and read, I've been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2.20 Christ's sacrifice was the source of Paul's joy, and thus his strength. He said, God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you study the New Testament, you'll see that God's love is almost always given in direct correlation to the cross.

And this is love. For God so loved the world. God demonstrated his love.

The cross is the focal point of God's love for the world. Those who look to the cross as a token of God's love will never doubt his steadfast devotion to them regardless of their circumstances. But those who come to Christ seeking a wonderful life will think that their happiness is evidence of God's love and therefore when trials come and their happiness leaves, they may think that God has forsaken them or worse, that he doesn't exist.

For example, consider this excerpt from an article titled Is There Happiness Without Jesus? by Merle Hertzler. This article reveals the common and bitter fruit of preaching the happiness gospel. Quote, Much of the Bible is false.

God never visited this world as a man or on our own in this world without direct intervention from God. So it would seem to me. How do you react to those statements? Does it make you feel sad to think that someone would write them? Perhaps to you Christ is the only hope in this world.

Your life is centered on him. He's your purpose in life. He's your Lord and your Redeemer.

I understand. I've been there. I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior many years ago.

I've read the Bible from cover to cover six times. Every chapter, every verse, and every line. I've been there and done that.

I know the excitement of doing God's work all day Sunday. I also know the emptiness that would come on Monday. I'm no longer a Christian.

I'm no longer marching in the Christian army. For I've found something different. Life without Christianity is far more fulfilling than anything I had ever found inside of Christianity.

There are hundreds of others who can testify to the same thing. I'm not a Christian and I am happy. Perhaps you have indeed found genuine happiness in Christianity.

I'm glad for you. I hope you understand that others have found happiness elsewhere. You may not need what I have to be happy and I may not need what you have.

End of quote. What a tragedy that he thought that the precious blood of the Savior was shed simply to make him happy in this life rather than to make him prepared for the next one. It does not appear that this man was told about this real need to repent or he'd perish.

If the happy life is different from the abundant life Jesus offers who's going to listen? If we blatantly be honest about the persecution promised for all, all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 2 Timothy 3.12 Certainly not as many as attracted by the talk of a wonderful plan. What then is the answer to this dilemma? How are we to bring sinners to the Savior? We will address this in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

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Chapter four, The Lost Key. As a brand new convert and an avid surfer, I told my buddies that I'd found something that was better than surfing. They couldn't believe that it could be such a thing, but with my continual hounding a number decided to experiment and prayed the sinner's prayer.

Not because they realized they'd sinned against God and were repentant, but because they wanted to see if what I was saying was true. Within a very short time almost all fell away from the faith, much to my dismay. I never fully understood why this happened until August 1982.

One Friday afternoon I was sitting in my office reading a portion of a sermon by Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers. I was fascinated to find that the Prince of Preachers used God's law, the Ten Commandments, to cause his hearers to tremble. This is what I read that began a radical change in my life.

Quote, There is a law between you and God's law. The Ten Commandments are against you. The first comes forward and says, Let him be cursed, for he denies me.

He has another God beside me. His God is his belly, and he yields his homage to his lust. All the Ten Commandments, like ten great cannons, are pointed at you today, for you've broken all of God's statutes and lived in naive neglect of all his commands.

So, you will find it a hard thing to go at war with the law. When the law came in peace, Sinai was altogether on a smoke, and even Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. What will you do when the law of God comes in terror? When the trumpet of the archangel shall tear you from your grave? When the eyes of God shall burn their way into your guilty soul? When the great book shall be opened, and all your shame and sin shall be punished? Can you stand against an angry law in that day? End of quote.

A few days later, as I was reading Galatians 3.24, the question suddenly struck me. Is it legitimate to use the law as a schoolmaster to bring sinners to Christ, just as it brought Israel to Christ? I closed my Bible and began to search for a sinner on whom I could experiment. When I found a gentleman who was open to conversation, I took him through the Ten Commandments first, and then I shared the cross.

He stood to his feet and said, I've never heard anyone put that so clearly in all my life. It was like a light went on in both our heads. He understood the gospel, and I began to understand the great principle that the law was a schoolmaster that brings the knowledge of sin convincing a sinner of his need of the Savior.

I immediately began to study scripture, as well as the gospel proclamation of men like John Wesley, Spurgeon, Whitefield, Moody, Luther, and others whom God used down through the ages. I found they used a principle that is almost entirely neglected by modern evangelical methods. They warned that if the law wasn't used to prepare the way for the gospel, those who made decisions for Christ would almost certainly be false in their profession and would fall away.

The purpose of the law. When I speak of using the law in evangelism, I don't mean merely making a casual reference to it. Rather, the law should be the backbone of our gospel presentation, because its function is to prepare the sinner's heart for grace.

Martin Luther said of the law, In its true and proper work and purpose it humbles a man and prepares him, if he uses the law correctly, to yearn and seek for grace. The Bible tells us in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 8 in the Amplified Bible, Now we recognize and know that the law is good if anyone uses it lawfully for the purpose for which it was designed. For what purpose was the law designed? The following verse tells us, The law is not made for a righteous person, but for sinners.

1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 9. And even less the sinners, forerunners, murderers, fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, etc. The law's main design is not for the saved, but for the unsaved. It was given primarily as an evangelistic tool, as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

D. L. Moody said the law can only chase us to Calvary. No further. However, it is unlawful to use the law to try and use it for justification.

No one will make it to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments. The scriptures make that very clear. A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

For by the works of the law, no flesh shall be justified. Galatians 2 verse 16. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and Christ alone.

The law's rightful purpose is simply to act as a mirror to show us that we need cleansing. Those who seek to be justified by the law are taking the mirror off the wall and trying to wash themselves with it. Used correctly, that is lawfully, the law is the rod and staff of the shepherd to guide the sheep to himself.

It is the net of the fisherman, the plough of the farmer. It's the ten golden trumpets that prepare the way of the king. The law makes the sinner thirst for righteousness, that he might live.

Its holy light reveals the dust of sin on the table of the human heart, so that the gospel and the hand of the Spirit can wipe it perfectly clean. In Numbers 21, 6 through to 9, God sent fiery serpents among the Israelites, causing them to admit that they had sinned. When the people turned to God in repentance, he instructed Moses to craft a bronze serpent and place it on a pole where the people could see it.

Those who had been bitten and were doomed to die could look upon the bronze serpent and live. In John 3, 14, Jesus specifically cites this Old Testament passage in reference to his impending sacrifice on the cross to purchase our salvation from sin. The ten commandments are like ten biting serpents that carry with them the venomous curse of the law.

They drive sinners to look on the one lifted up on the cross. If the law of Moses did not demand death for sin, Jesus would not have had to die. The Messiah became a curse for us and redeemed us from the curse of the law.

Galatians 3, 13. The Old Testament said of the Messiah that he would magnify the law and make it honorable. Isaiah 42 verse 21.

The religious leaders had demeaned and dishonored God's law. By their tradition, they had twisted its ordinances, rendering it ineffectual. They had neglected the weightier matters of the law, limiting the scope of its precepts to mere outward piety.

In doing so, they had nullified the law's power to accomplish its purpose, bringing people to the knowledge of their sinfulness and the need for repentance and salvation. They even hindered others from entering into the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus said to them.

Woe to you lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves and those who were entering in, you hindered. Luke 10, 52.

These lawyers were professing to be experts in God's law, but because they did not use the key of knowledge to bring sinners to the Savior, they hindered the work of the law as a groundbreaking instrument in people's hearts. So Jesus first straightened out what the religious leaders had bent and honored what they had demeaned. He said, quote, Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets.

I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For surely I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle of the law by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. End of quote.

Next, Jesus opened up the spiritual nature of the law, showing how God's desire is for truth in the inward parts. God will judge not only the actions but the thoughts and intents of the heart. Notice how Jesus magnifies the sixth and seventh commandments.

Quote, If heard that it was said of them of old, you shall not murder. And whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

And whoever says to his brother, racker, shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, you fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. If heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you that whoever looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. End of quote. Later in the same discourse, Jesus, the master teacher, magnifies the law further by opening up the ninth commandment.

Quote, Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely. But you shall perform your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

Nor should you swear by your head, because you cannot make one here white or black. But let your yes be yes, and your no be no. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Jesus concluded this part of his teaching by saying, Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. This statement must have left us here as speechless, which is likely what Jesus intended, because the function of the law is that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Romans 3 verse 19.

Who can justify themselves in God's sight if we are commanded to be perfect? No one. Our mouths are stopped, and we see our guilt. Some Bible commentators suggested that Jesus didn't really mean perfect, because that would require us to be without defect and flawless.

Instead, they contend that he was telling us to be mature. However, if that were true, then Jesus would be saying, You are to be mature as your heavenly Father is mature. Calling God mature would imply that he once was immature.

Such a thought is clearly contrary to scripture. God never changes. He's always been perfect and doesn't need to mature.

His law is also perfect, and if we're not perfect in accordance with the law, we'll perish on the day of judgment. That's why the apostle Paul says that we're to warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Scripture makes clear that it is the perfect law of God that actually converts the soul.

The law of the law is perfect, converting the soul. Psalm 19 verse 7. Matthew Henry says, Of this excellent use is the law. It converts the soul, opens the eyes, prepares the way of the Lord in the desert, rends the rocks, levels the mountains, makes a people prepared for the Lord.

The offense and foolishness of the cross. According to scripture, the real function of the law is to make men recognize and be conscious of sin. Not a mere perception, but an acquaintance with sin which works towards repentance.

Romans 3 20 from the Amplified Bible. To illustrate this point, let's look for a moment at civil law. Imagine if I said to you, I've got some good news for you.

Someone's just paid a \$25,000 speeding fine on your behalf. You'd probably respond with some cynicism in your voice. What are you talking about? That's not good news.

It doesn't make sense. I don't have a \$25,000 speeding fine. Your reaction would be quite understandable.

If you don't know you've broken the law in the first place, the good news is someone paying the fine for you is not good news. It'll be foolishness to you. But more than that, it will be offensive to you because I'm insinuating you've broken the law when you don't think you have.

However, if I was to put it this way, it may make more sense. Today, a law enforcement officer clocked you at traveling at 55 miles an hour in an area designated for a blind children's convention. There were 10 clear warning signs indicating that the maximum speed was 15 miles an hour, but you completely ignored them and went straight through at 55 miles an hour.

What you did was extremely dangerous. There's a \$25,000 fine or imprisonment. As you begin to see the seriousness of what you've done, I explain, the law was about to take its course when someone you don't even know stepped in and paid the fine for you.

You are very fortunate. Can you see that telling you precisely what you've done wrong first actually makes the good news make sense? If I don't clearly bring instruction and understand that you've violated the law, then the good news will seem foolishness and it will seem offensive. But once you understand you've broken the law, then the good news that your penalty has been paid will become good news indeed.

In the same way, if I approach an impenitent sinner and say, Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins, it'll be foolishness to him and offensive to him. It'll be foolishness because it won't make sense. The Bible tells us that.

The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. And it'll be offensive because I'm insinuating that he's a sinner when he doesn't think he is. As far as he's concerned, there are a lot of people far worse than he is.

But if I take the time to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, it may make more sense. If I open up the divine law, the ten commandments, to show the sinner precisely what he's done wrong, that he's offended God by violating his law, then he'll become convicted by the law as a transgressor. Once he understands his transgression, the good news of his penalty being paid will not be foolishness, nor will it be offensive.

It will be the power of God to salvation. With those few thoughts in mind, let's look at some of the functions of God's law for humanity. Romans 3.19 says, So one function of God's law is to stop the mouth, to stop sinners from justifying themselves and saying, there are plenty of people worse than me.

I'm not a bad person, really. The law stops the mouth of justification and leaves not just the Jews, but the whole world guilty before God. Romans 3.20, the next verse says, In fact, 1 John 3.4 tells us the biblical definition of sin.

Sin is lawlessness, or as the King James Translation puts it, sin is transgression of the law. In Romans 7.7, Paul asks, Paul is reiterating, I didn't know what sin was until the law told me. Since the definition of sin is transgression of the law, according to scripture, the only way people can know their sin is by seeing themselves in the light of God's moral law.

The wonderful thing about God's law is that God has taken the time to write it upon our heart. Romans 2.15 says, The word conscience means with knowledge. Con is with, science is knowledge.

So each time we lie, steal, fornicate, blaspheme, commit adultery, etc., we do it with knowledge that it's wrong. God has given light to every man. Society may shape our conscience, but God is its giver, and no society, regardless of how primitive, has been left in complete moral darkness.

This is why the law is so effective universally. The conscience echoes the commandments, it bears witness. For this reason, according to Martin Luther, the first duty of the gospel preacher is to declare God's law and show the nature of sin.

Martin Lloyd-Jones said, That's why great evangelical preachers 300 years ago, in the time of the Puritans, and 200 years ago, in the time of Whitefield and others, always engaged in what they called a preliminary law work. When we use the law to appeal to the conscience and bring the

knowledge of sin, we merely work with the Holy Spirit to convince people of their transgression. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

Scripture states that sin is transgression of the law, righteousness is of the law, and judgment is by the law. We must have absolute reliance on the Holy Spirit for the conversion of the lost. Without the Holy Spirit, anything we preach is nothing but dead letter.

He convicts the world of sin, and He has chosen to do this through the foolishness of preaching. Billy Graham said the Holy Spirit convicts us. He shows us the Ten Commandments.

The law is the schoolmaster that leads us to Christ. Spurgeon adds, when the Holy Spirit comes to us, He shows us what the law really is. Paris Readhead warned, If the law has no part in bringing a sinner to Christ, why did Paul say that the law was instrumental in his conversion? He didn't say, I would not have known sin except through the Holy Spirit, or by the Holy Spirit is the knowledge of sin, or that through the Holy Spirit sin became exceedingly sinful.

Instead, he said it was the law and the hand of the Spirit that produced this state of conviction. John Wesley observed, It is the ordinary method of the Spirit of God to convict sinners by the law. It is this which, being set home on the conscience, generally breaks the rock in pieces.

It is more especially this part of the Word of God which is quick and powerful, full of life and energy, and sharper than any two-edged sword. By this is the sinner discovered to himself. All his fig leaves are torn away, and he sees that he is wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked.

The law flashes conviction on every sight. He feels himself a mere sinner. He has nothing to pay.

His mouth is stopped, and he stands guilty before God. The use of the law and evangelism is the neglected key to the sinner's heart in order for there to be conviction and conversion. Many of us in the past have wanted to avoid making sinners feel guilty, yet the reality is that they are guilty before God.

In the next chapter, we're going to look at why bringing the knowledge of sin is an essential step in preparing the heart for grace.

## Chapter 5

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Chapter 5 Making Grace Amazing From the moment of my conversion, I have been vainly trying to find words to describe the insanity of a dying world rejecting God's gift of everlasting life. In a sense, man has a God-shaped hole in his head. It is only when the Holy Spirit rushes in that we receive a sound mind.

We insanely run at hell as though it were heaven, and reject heaven as though it were hell itself. I am eternally thankful to God for His amazing grace, which reached down one dark night in 1972 and saved a wretch like me. We long for others to have that same thankfulness, but unbelievers cannot comprehend God's grace until they recognize their guilt.

As John MacArthur noted, God's grace cannot be faithfully preached to unbelievers until the law is preached and man's corrupt nature is exposed. It is impossible for a person to fully realize his need for God's grace until he sees how terribly he has failed the standards of God's law. In Romans 5.20, Paul explains further why God's law entered the scene.

Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound, but where sin abounded, grace abounded much more. When sin abounds, grace abounds much more according to Scripture. The thing that makes sin abound is the law.

Again, we can see the work of God's law illustrated in civil law. Watch what happens on a freeway when there's no visible sign of law enforcement. See how motorists exceed the speed limit.

It would seem that each speeder thinks to himself that the law has forgotten to patrol his part of the freeway. He's transgressing the law only by 15 miles an hour, and besides, he isn't the only one that's doing it. Notice, however, what happens when the law enters the fast lane with red lights flashing.

The speedster's heart misses a beat. He's no longer secure in the fact that other motorists are also speeding. He knows that he is personally guilty, and he could be the one the officer pulls over.

Suddenly, his mere 15 miles per hour transgression doesn't seem such a small thing after all. It seems to abound. Look at the freeway of sin.

The whole world naturally goes with the flow. Who hasn't had a lustful thought at one time or another? Who in today's society doesn't tell the occasional white lie? Who hasn't taken something that belongs to someone else, even if it's just a white-collar crime? They know they're doing wrong, but their security lies in the fact that so many others are just as guilty, if not more so. It seems that God has forgotten all about sin in the Ten Commandments.

The sinner has said in his heart, God has forgotten. He hides his face. He'll never see.

Psalm 10 verse 11. Now watch the law enter with red lights flashing. The sinner's heart skips a beat.

He examines the speed armor of his conscience. Suddenly, it shows him the measure of his guilt in a new light, the light of the law. His sense of security in the fact there are multitudes doing the same thing becomes irrelevant because every man will give an account of himself to God.

Sin not only becomes personal, it seems to abound. The law shows him that his mere lust becomes adultery of the heart. His white lie becomes false witness.

His own way becomes rebellion in violation of the first commandment. His hatred becomes murder in God's sight. His sticky fingers make him a thief.

Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound. Without the entrance of the law, sin is neither personal nor is it a threat. For without the law, sin is dead.

The sense of it is inactive and a lifeless thing. Romans 7 verse 8 from the Amplified Bible. It is the commandment that shows sin in its true light, that it is exceedingly sinful.

The guilty sinner places his hand on his mouth with nothing to say in his defense. As he understands the seriousness of his sins in God's eyes, he now sees his need of the Savior. In Galatians 3 24 we read, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

God's law acts as a schoolmaster or tutor to bring us to Jesus Christ that we can be justified through faith in his blood. As John R Stott said, quote, we cannot come to Christ to be justified until we've first been to Moses to be condemned. But once we've gone to Moses and acknowledged our sin, guilt, and condemnation, we must not stay there.

We must let Moses send us to Christ. End of quote. The law doesn't help us, it leaves us helpless.

It doesn't justify us, it just leaves us guilty before the judgment bar of a holy God. The tragedy is that just over a hundred years ago when the church forsook the law and its capacity to bring the knowledge of sin and drive sinners to Christ, it therefore had to find another reason for sinners to respond to the gospel. Modern evangelism chose to attract sinners using the issue of life enhancement.

The gospel degenerated into Jesus Christ will give you peace, love, joy, and fulfillment with lasting happiness. To Martin Lloyd-Jones, one of the most influential preachers of the 20th century, this is not evangelism at all. Quote, there is no true evangelism without the doctrine of sin and without an understanding of what sin is.

I do not want to be unfair, but I say that a gospel which merely says come to Jesus and offers him as a friend and offers a marvelous new life without convicting of sin is not New Testament evangelism. The essence of evangelism is to start by preaching the law, and it is because the law has not been preached that we have had so much superficial evangelism. True evangelism must always start by preaching the law.

End of quote. Sadly, we've moved away from true evangelism by preaching a gospel of grace without first convincing men that that transgresses. Consequently, many people I witness to claim to have been born again three or four times, so that statements like this are commonplace.

I got saved when I was six, and then again at 12, and then I fell away and got into some real bad stuff and came back to the Lord when I was 23. It's very apparent that the person is not a Christian. He admits to being a fornicator, a liar, a blasphemer, has no sense of the things of God, but he thinks he's saved because he's been born again.

He's using the grace of our God for an occasion of the flesh. For him, it's not a bad thing to trample the blood of Christ underfoot. Why? Because he's never been convinced of the disease of sin that he might appreciate the cure of the gospel.

According to Paris Readhead, quote, we have gospel-hardened a generation of sinners by telling them how to be saved before they have any understanding why they need to be saved. End of quote. Readhead simply believed that we should not prescribe a cure before we have convinced of the disease.

He was not alone in this thought. D.L. Moody states, quote, it is a great mistake to give a man who has not been convicted of sin certain passages that were never meant for him. The law is what he needs.

Do not offer the consolation of the gospel until he sees and knows he's guilty before God. We must give enough of the law to take away all self-righteousness. I pity the man who preaches only one side of the truth, always the gospel and never the law.

End of quote. When we set aside the law of God and its designed function to convert the soul, we removed the very means by which sinners are able to see the need for God's forgiveness. Matthew Henry stated, quote, as that which is straight discovers that which is crooked, as the looking glass shows us our natural face with its spots and deformities, so there is no way of coming to the knowledge of sin which is necessary to repentance and consequently to peace and pardon, but by comparing our hearts and lives with the law.

End of quote. John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress, noted, the man who does not know the nature of the law cannot know the nature of sin. What sin are you talking about? When David sinned with Bathsheba, he broke every one of the ten commandments, coveted his neighbor's wife, he lived a lie, stole her, committed adultery, murdered her husband, dishonored his parents, and thus broke the remaining four commandments in reference to his relationship with God.

So the Lord sent Nathan, the prophet, to reprove him. There is great significance in the order in which the reproof came. Nathan gave David, the shepherd of Israel, a parable about something he could understand, sheep.

Nathan began with a natural realm rather than immediately exposing the king's sin. He told a story about a rich man who, instead of taking a sheep from his own flock, killed a poor man's pet lamb to feed a hungry stranger. David was indignant and sat up on his high throne of self-righteousness.

He revealed his knowledge of the law by saying that the guilty party should restore fourfold for the lamb and should die for his crime. Nathan then exposed the king's sin of taking another man's lamb, saying, You are the man! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in his sight? When David cried, I have sinned against the Lord, the prophet then gave him grace and said, The Lord also has put away your sin. You shall not die.

Imagine if Nathan, fearful of rejection, decided to change things around a little and added a few of his own thoughts. Instead, he says to the king, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. However, there's something that's keeping you from enjoying this wonderful plan.

It's called sin. Imagine if he had glossed over the personal nature of David's general reference to all men having sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. David's reaction might have been, What sin are you talking about? Rather than to admit his terrible transgression, think of it.

Why should he say I have sinned against the Lord after hearing that message? Instead, in a sincere desire to experience this wonderful plan, he might have admitted that he, like all men, had sinned and fallen short of God's glory. If David had not been made to tremble under the wrath of the law, the prophet would have removed the very means of producing godly sorrow which is so necessary for David's repentance. It is conviction of sin that causes godly sorrow, and godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation.

It was the weight of David's personal guilt that caused him to cry out, I have sinned against the Lord. The law caused him to labor and become heavy laden and made him hunger and thirst for righteousness and enlightened him about the serious nature of sin as far as God was concerned. In today's gospel, Authentic or Synthetic, Walter Chantry writes, It is imperative that preachers of today learn how to declare the spiritual law of God, for until we learn how to wound consciences, we shall have no wounds to bind with gospel bandages.

George Whitefield, possibly the most famous religious figure of the 18th century, understood the necessity of presenting the law before the gospel. He said, First then, before you can speak peace to your hearts, you must be made to see, made to feel, made to weep over, made to bewail your actual transgressions against the law of God. When Nathan brought the good news that David wouldn't die, that God had put away his sin, do you think the guilty king was relieved? Do you think he was grateful to God for his mercy? I think he would have been unspeakably grateful.

What do you think would have made him appreciate that mercy? Wouldn't it have been the fact that he, in the light of Nathan's rebuke, suddenly saw the reality of his guilt? The more David understood his personal guilt before God, the more he appreciated free mercy. If he'd been left to thinking lightly of sin, he would have thought lightly of God's mercy. That's why it's essential to expound the law, the sinner, and to make him feel his personal guilt.

The sinner has sinned against God by violating his law a multitude of times, and he's an enemy of God in his mind through wicked works. The reality is that God is angry with the wicked every day, and that God's wrath abides on him. With each transgression, sinners are treasuring up for themselves wrath that'll be revealed on the day of wrath.

Perhaps you're tempted to say that we should never condemn sinners by using the law. However, Scripture tells us they're already condemned. He who does not believe is condemned already.

John 3 verse 18. All the law does is show them their true state. If you dust a table in your living room and think it's dust free, try pulling back the curtains and letting in the early morning sunlight.

You'll more than likely see dust still on the table. The sunlight didn't create the dust, it merely exposed it. When we take the time to draw back the high and heavy curtains of the holy of holies and let the light of God's law shine upon a sinner's heart, the law merely shows him his true state

before God.

Proverbs 6 23 tells us the commandment is a lamp and the law is light. As the sinner sits as king on the throne of self-righteousness, deceived by sin, you ought to be a Nathan to him and say, you are the man. The more understanding he has of his sin, the more he'll appreciate the mercy of the cross.

If men do not understand the law, explains Charles Spurgeon, they'll not feel that they're sinners, and if they're not consciously sinners, they'll never value the sin offering. There is no healing a man till the law has wounded him, no making him alive till the law has slain him. After Kirk Cameron first heard this teaching on the use of the law, he sent me the following email, quote, Ray, I was so fired up after leaving your place.

Your teachings on the law and grace have made more sense to me than anyone else's, and I'm so thankful for what God is doing. I believe I was robbed of the deep pain of seeing the depth of my sinfulness, of experiencing the exceeding joy and gratitude that comes from the cross, because I was convinced of God's love before I was convinced of my sin. I didn't see the big problem, but by faith, believed that I was a sinner, many worse than me, but nevertheless a sinner, and repented of my general sinful selfish attitude.

I never opened up the ten commandments and looked deep into the well of my own sinful heart. I never imagined that God was actually angry with me at a certain point because of my sin. Because of grace, I kind of skipped over that part and was just thankful that he loved me and had promised me everlasting life.

While I think I was saved 13 years ago, I was rocked out of my chair last night, on my knees confessing the specific sins that had plagued my heart and that had never been uncovered before. I think my knowledge of the new covenant and under grace not law kept me from examining my own heart in the light of the ten commandments. The new weight of my sin is causing more pain to me, wounding my ego, and showing me how much more Jesus had to pay to set me free.

Oh, the wonderful cross! End of quote. The lawless message that God has a wonderful plan for your life doesn't cause the sinner to tremble and cry out of sin against God. Though they may acknowledge that, like all men, they fall short of the glory of God, it doesn't show them the serious nature of their personal transgression.

Consequently, the depth of their sorrow is in proportion to their shallow understanding of the seriousness of their sin. They do not experience a godly sorrow that's necessary for repentance. However, when we help sinners see the depth of their sin in the light of the perfect law, it makes God's grace truly amazing.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the law makes grace abound in the same way that darkness makes light shine. It was John Newton, the writer of Amazing Grace, who said, Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes, warning that a wrong understanding of the harmony between law and grace would produce, quote, error on the left and on the right hand. I don't know whether any of us could claim to have a better understanding of grace than the one who penned such a hymn.

What I'm saying is not some new doctrine. The use of the law and evangelism is rooted both in scripture and in church history. The enemy has hidden it, and that has created havoc within Christendom.

In *Striking Incidents of Saving Grace*, Henry Breeden tells of a preacher in Colliery, England, who saw a number of conversions take place under his ministry. Then in 1861, a stranger passed through and conducted meetings in which, quote, there were great numbers of persons who professed faith in Jesus. The preacher then recounts the sad effects, quote, but many of them were, in a short time, gone back again into the world.

Indeed, so complete was the failure that that minister who succeeded me in the circuit said, quote, there was not one single person out of about 90 who professed to obtain religion through that man's services. They continued to be a member of the Corollary Church. I had observed the same sort of thing before in regard to the efforts of such like persons in other places, and therefore I was very desirous to find out what was the cause of such failures.

I was sure that the persons said to be brought in under my ministry had nearly all of them held on to their way and were then members, either in the church above or in the church below. So I set myself calmly to consider the whole affair. In doing so, I soon found that the preaching that does not address the sinner's conscience and does not strive to break the unconverted spirit down by enforcing the law of God scarcely ever leads to salvation of a soul.

And these men scarcely ever preach the law. Yes, that is it, and nothing else, quote, by the law is the knowledge of sin. Let a minister get that important sentiment burned into his very soul by the light and flaming love of God, and then let him go forth and preach the truth as it is in Jesus, and many, many precious souls will soon be saved.

But let him omit preaching the law and whatever else he may do, for he can accomplish many great things, yet under that man's ministry conversions will be scarce, end of quote. I couldn't give a heartier amen to that conclusion. Yes, that is it, and nothing else, by the law is the knowledge of sin.

This teaching is so foundational, and yet we've failed to see its simple truth. In the next chapter, we're going to look at the importance of a sinner's motive in responding to the gospel.

## Chapter 6

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Chapter 6. The Motive and the Result So far we've looked at the dismal moral state of the contemporary church. We've seen that there are millions within the church who do not have the things that accompany salvation, and multitudes of others who have fallen away from the faith. This has happened because the law has not been used to bring the knowledge of sin.

Instead, we've used an unbiblical method of attracting sinners to the wonderful new life in Christ. We're now going to look closely at what happens to the sinner's motive when this modern method is used. Consider the following scenario.

Two men are seated in a plane. The first is given a parachute and told to put it on because it would improve his flight. He's a little sceptical at first.

He can't see how wearing a parachute on a plane could possibly improve his flight. After a time, he decides to experiment and see if the claim is true. As he straps the parachute on his back, he notices the weight of it upon his shoulders, and he finds that he has difficulty in sitting upright.

However, he consoles himself with a flight attendant's promise that the parachute would improve his flight. So he decides to give the thing a little time. As the flight progresses, he notices that some of the other passengers are laughing at him because he's wearing a parachute in a plane.

He begins to feel somewhat humiliated. As they continue to laugh and point at him, he can't stand it no longer. He slinks in his seat, unstraps the parachute, and throws it to the floor.

Disillusionment and bitterness fill his heart because, as far as he was concerned, he was told an outright lie. The second man is also given a parachute, but listen to what he's told. He's told to put it on because at any moment he'd be jumping 25,000 feet out of the plane.

He gratefully puts the parachute on. He doesn't notice the weight of it on his shoulders, nor that he can't sit upright. His mind is consumed with the thought of what would happen to him if he jumped without that parachute.

Now let's analyze the motive and the result of each passenger's experience. The first man's motive for putting the parachute on was solely to improve his flight. The result of his experience was that he was humiliated by the other passengers, he was disillusioned and somewhat embittered against those who gave him the parachute.

As far as he's concerned, it'll be a long time before anyone gets one of those things on his back again. The second man put the parachute on solely to escape the jump to come. Because of his knowledge of what would happen to him without it, he has a deep-rooted joy and peace in his heart knowing that he's safe from sure death.

This knowledge gives him the ability to withstand the mockery of the other passengers. His attitude toward those who gave him the parachute is one of heartfelt gratitude. Many modern evangelistic appeals say, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

He'll give you love, joy, peace, fulfillment and lasting happiness. In other words, Jesus will improve your flight. The sinner responds and in an experimental fashion puts on the Savior to see if the claims are true.

And what does he get? The promised temptation, tribulation and persecution. He finds it difficult to live an upright life. Not only that, but other people mock him for his faith.

So what does he do? He takes off the Lord Jesus Christ. He's offended for the word's sake. He's disillusioned and somewhat embittered and quite rightly so.

He was promised peace, joy, love, fulfillment and lasting happiness. And all he got were trials and humiliation. His bitterness is directed at those that gave him the so-called good news.

Because he thinks he tried Jesus and it didn't work out, his latter end becomes worse than the first. He's now another inoculated and bitter backslider. Instead of preaching that Jesus improves the flight, we should be warning passengers that one day they're going to have to jump out of the plane.

It's appointed a man once to die and after this the judgment. When a sinner understands the horrific consequences of breaking the law of God, he will flee to the Savior in genuine repentance solely to escape the wrath that's to come. And if we're true and faithful witnesses, that's what we'll be preaching.

That there is wrath to come and that God commands all men everywhere to repent because he's appointed a day in which he'll judge the world in righteousness. The issue isn't one of happiness, but righteousness. It doesn't matter how happy a sinner is or how much he's enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season, without the righteousness of Christ, he'll perish on the day of wrath.

The Bible says riches profit not on the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. Peace and joy are legitimate fruits of salvation, but it's not legitimate to use these fruits as a drawcard for salvation. If we continue to do so, sinners will respond with an impure motive lacking repentance.

Can you remember why the second passenger had joy and peace in his heart? It was because he knew that that parachute was going to save him from a certain death. In the same way as Christians, we have joy and peace in believing because we know that the righteousness of Christ is going to deliver us from the wrath that's to come. With that thought in mind, let's take another look at an incident on board the plane.

We have a brand new flight attendant. It's her first day. She's carrying a tray of boiling hot coffee.

As she's walking down the aisle, she trips over someone's foot and slops that boiling hot coffee all over the lap of our second passenger. What's his reaction as that boiling liquid hits his tender flesh? Does he say, man, that hurt? Yes, he does. But then does he rip the parachute off his shoulders, throw it to the floor and say, stupid parachute? No, why should he? He didn't put the parachute on for a better flight.

He put it on to save him from the jump to come. If anything, the hot coffee incident causes him to cling tighter to the parachute and even look forward to the jump. If we put on the Lord Jesus Christ for the right motive, to flee from the wrath that's to come, when tribulation strikes, when the flight

gets bumpy, when we get burned by circumstances, we won't get angry at God.

We won't lose our joy or peace. Why should we? We didn't come to Jesus for a better lifestyle, but to flee from the wrath that's to come. If anything, tribulation drives a true believer closer to the Savior.

And sadly, we have multitudes of professing Christians who lose their joy and peace when the flight gets bumpy. Why? They're the products of a man-centered gospel. They came lacking repentance, without which they cannot be saved.

As Peter preached, he commanded his hearers to repent for the remission of sins. Without repentance, there's no remission of sins. Peter further said, repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.

We cannot be converted unless we repent, and that's why Jesus commanded that repentance be preached to all nations. Luke 24, 47 Superficial Repentance For many years, I suffered from the disease of evangelical frustration. I so wanted sinners to respond to the gospel that I unwittingly preached a man-centered message, the essence of which was this.

You'll never find true peace without Jesus Christ. There's a God-shaped vacuum in your heart that only He can fill. I'd preach Christ crucified.

I'd preach repentance. A sinner would respond to the altar, and I'd think, oh, this guy wants to give his heart to Jesus, and there's an 80% chance he's going to backslide. So I better make sure he really means it.

He better be sincere. So I'd tell him, now repeat this prayer sincerely after me, and really mean it from your heart sincerely, and make sure you really mean it from your heart. And I'd say, oh, God, I'm a sinner.

And he'd smack his chewing gum and say, yeah, oh, God, I'm a sinner. I'd wonder, why isn't there any visible sign of contrition? There's no outward evidence the guy is inwardly sorry for his sins. But if I'd seen his motive, I would have seen that he was 100% sincere.

He really did mean his decision with all his heart. He sincerely wanted to give this Jesus thing a go to see if it's as good as buzz as everybody says it is. Tried sex, drugs, materialism, alcohol, why not give Christianity a try to see if it's as good as all these Christians keep saying it is? Peace, joy, love, fulfillment, and lasting happiness? He'd be a fool not to give it a try.

He wasn't fleeing from the wrath that was to come because I hadn't told him there was wrath to come. There was a glaring omission from my preaching. He wasn't broken in contrition because the poor guy didn't know what sin was.

Remember Romans 7 verse 7? Paul said, I had not known sin except through the law. How can a man repent of sin if he doesn't know what sin is? Any so-called repentance would be merely what I call horizontal repentance. A sinner may feel sorry because he's lied to men or stolen from men, etc.

But when David sinned with Bathsheba, he didn't say I've sinned against man. He acknowledged to God against you and you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight. When Joseph was

tempted sexually, he said, how can I do this thing and sin against God? The prodigal son admitted, I have sinned against heaven.

Because all sin is against God, Paul preached that we must exercise repentance towards God, the one we have offended. However, when a man doesn't understand that his sin is primarily vertical, that he has sinned against God, he'll not seek his forgiveness. He'll merely respond with superficial, experimental and horizontal repentance and will fall away when tribulation, temptation and persecution come.

**The Tragic Results** If we continue to offer the Savior merely as a means of life enhancement, many will respond to the gospel for the wrong motive. To see the effect of neglecting to use the law to bring sinners to genuine repentance, let's take a closer look at the tragic results of unbiblical methods of contemporary evangelism. These statistics represent the eternal salvation of human beings.

Please listen to them with the same sobriety you'd have while walking through a Holocaust museum. At a 1990 crusade in the United States, 600 decisions for Christ were obtained. No doubt there was much rejoicing.

However, 90 days later, follow-up workers could not find even one who was continuing in the faith. That crusade created 600 backsliders, or to be more scriptural, false converts. In Cleveland, Ohio, an inner-city outreach brought 400 decisions.

The rejoicing no doubt tapered off when follow-up workers could not find a single of the 400 who had supposedly made a decision. In 1991, organizers of a Salt Lake City concert encouraged follow-up and discovered less than 5% of those who respond to an altar during a public crusade are living a Christian life one year later. In other words, more than 95% proved to be false converts.

In 1985, a four-day crusade obtained 207 decisions. However, according to a member of the organizing committee, 92% fell away. In his book, *Today's Evangelism*, Ernest C. Resigner said of one outreach event, quote, it lasted eight days and there were 68 supposed conversions.

A month later, not one of those converts could be found. A church in Boulder, Colorado, sent a team to Russia in 1991 and obtained 2,500 decisions. The next year, the team found only 30 continuing in their faith.

That's a retention rate of 1.2%. According to Pastor Elmer Murdoch, quote, Chuck Colson states that for every 100 people making decisions for Christ, only two may return for follow-up a few days later. George Barner says that the majority of people, that is 51% minimum, making decisions leave the church in six to eight weeks. Between 1995 and 2005, Assemblies of God churches reported an amazing 5,339,144 decisions for Christ.

Their net gain in attendance was 221,790. That means 5,117,354 over 5 million decisions couldn't be accounted for. Charles E. Hackett, the National Director of Home Missions for the Assemblies of God in the United States, said, quote, a soul at the altar does not generate much excitement in some circles because we realize approximately 95% of every 100 will not become integrated into the church.

In fact, most of them will not return for a second visit. In Sacramento, California, a combined church crusade yielded more than 2,000 commitments. One church followed up on 52 of those decisions and could not find one true convert.

In Leeds, England, a visiting American speaker acquired 400 decisions for a local church. Six weeks later, only two were still committed, and they eventually fell away. In November 1970, a number of churches combined for a convention in Fort Worth, Texas, and secured 30,000 decisions.

Six months later, the follow-up committee could find only 30 still continuing in the faith. A mass crusade reported 18,000 decisions, yet according to Church Growth magazine, 94% failed to become incorporated into a local church. Pastor Dennis Grinnell from Auckland, New Zealand, who has traveled to India every year since 1980, reported that he saw 80,000 decision cards stacked in a hut in the city of Ramadagiri, the result of past evangelistic crusades, but he maintained that one would be fortunate to find even 80 Christians in the entire city.

A leading US denomination reported that during 1995, they secured 384,057 decisions but retained only 22,983 in fellowship. They couldn't account for 361 and 74 supposed conversions. That's a 94% fall-away rate.

And finally, in Omaha, Nebraska, a pastor of a large church said he was involved in a crusade where 1,300 decisions were made, and yet not even one convert was continuing in the faith. Statistics such as these are very hard to find. One organizing committee is going to shout from the housetops that after a massive amount of pre-crusade prayer, hundreds of thousands of dollars of expenditure, preaching by a big-name evangelist, and truckloads of follow-up, the wonderful results that initially seemed apparent have all but disappeared.

Not only would such news be utterly disheartening for all who put so much time and effort into the crusade, but the committee has no reasonable explanation as to why the massive catch has disappeared. The statistics are therefore hushed up and swept under the carpet of discretion. A Southern California newspaper, however, bravely printed the following article in July of 1993.

Quote, Crusades don't do as much for non-believers as some might think, said Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. Three to 16% of those who make decisions in crusades end up responsible members of a church, he said. End of quote.

In October 2002, the pastor of a large church in Colorado Springs had a similar finding. Quote, Only 3-6% of those who respond in a crusade end up in a local church. That's a problem.

I was recently in a city that had a large crusade 18 months later and I asked them how many people saved in the crusade ended up in a local church. Not one person who gave his heart to Christ in that crusade ended up in a local church. End of quote.

These statistics of 84-97% fall away rate are not confined to crusades but are typical throughout the local church evangelism. Nor is this strictly a US phenomenon. Missionaries confirm that statistics are the same in South America and Europe.

An evangelist with a well-known international evangelism ministry noted a similar problem in their overseas efforts. He said, Many came to Christ, but when I started to do follow-up with them I

discovered they understood the gospel as a self-advancing thing and when I explained it more accurately to them they walked away from it. God loving them was fine.

God wanting a good life for them was fine. Their being sinful and Jesus being the only way, well, that was not acceptable. We fail them if we're not clear in those two things.

End of quote. I couldn't agree more with his last statement. The problem is not with crusades but with the methods and message of modern evangelism.

Follow-up still borns. A respected minister whose evangelism program has exploded across the world said that his evangelism course attempts to get at the heart of the fall away rate of new converts by placing great stress on follow-up. However, following up a false convert is like putting a still born baby into intensive care.

Neither approach solves the problem. Sometimes there's confusion between follow-up, meaning we need to follow the new converts around because they'll fall away if we don't, and discipleship, meaning teaching them to observe all things that I've commanded you. I believe in feeding converts.

I believe in nurturing them. Discipleship is biblical and most necessary, but I don't believe in following them. I can't find that in scripture.

Consider the Ethiopian eunuch. Not only was the new convert immediately left without follow-up, he was returning to an entirely unchristian nation. How could he survive? All he had was God and the scriptures.

This is because his salvation was not dependent on Philip, but upon his relationship with the indwelling Lord. Follow-up is when we get decisions either through crusades or the local church, and we take laborers from the harvest fields, who are few in number as it is, and give them the disheartening task of running after these converts to make sure they're continuing with God. This is a sad mission of the amount of confidence we have in the power of our message and in the keeping power of God.

In light of the fact that God is able to keep them from falling and present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, either he's not able to keep his converts or his hand is not in their profession of faith in the first place. If he's begun a good work in them, he'll complete it until that day. If he's the author of their faith, he'll be the finisher of their faith.

He's able to save to the uttermost them that come to God through him. Jesus said, no man will pluck you from my Father's hand. It's encouraging when a true conversion takes place because there'll be little need for any follow-up.

More than likely, you'll hardly be able to keep up with a convert yourself as he puts his hand to the plow and doesn't look back. When I passed from death to life way back in 1972, I immediately began devouring God's word. I disciplined myself to pray.

I shared my faith with all who would listen, and I didn't need to be coaxed into fellowship. I wanted to be with other Christians. I think that's a normal biblical conversion.

I'm not the only one who believes that the problem is not a lack of follow-up. Jim Elliffe, president of Christian Communications worldwide, quote, A great mistake is made by blaming the problem on poor follow-up. In many churches, there is every intention and effort given to follow-up, and yet still poor numbers persist.

One church followed up by the book, seeking to discipline people who had been told they were new converts during the crusade of an internationally known evangelist. The report of the pastor in charge was that none of them wanted to talk about how to grow as a Christian. He said, In fact, they ran from us.

Churches have learned to accept the fact that people who profess to have become Christians often have to be taught into going further, and that many, if not most, simply will not bother. Authentic new believers can always be followed up, however, because they have the spirit by which they cry Abba, Father. They have been given love for the brethren, an essential love for the beauty and authority of the Word of God.

But you cannot follow up a spiritually dead person. Being dead, he has no interest in growth. End of quote.

The problem is that Lazarus is four days dead. We can run into the tomb, pull him out, prop him up, open his eyes, but he stinks. He needs to hear the voice of the Son of God.

The sinner is dead in his sins. We can say, Pray this prayer, but he needs to hear the voice of the Son of God, or there's no life in him. And the thing that primes the sinner's ear to hear the voice of the Son of God is the law.

It is the law that converts the soul so that the person becomes a new creation in Christ. A well-known preacher of the past had warned, Evermore the law must prepare the way for the gospel. To overlook this in instructing souls is almost certain to result in false hope, the introduction of a false standard of Christian experience, and to fill the church with false converts.

Time will make this plain. If we continue to disregard the importance of using the law in bringing people to salvation, we will continue to witness the devastating results revealed in this chapter. When we speak about the hundreds of thousands who fall away from the faith, we can lose sight of the reality that these are individual human beings, and at stake is their eternal salvation from death and damnation.

We simply must stop telling people under God's wrath and head of the helm that God has a wonderful plan for their lives. If we fear God, we'll return to the pattern given to us in Scripture, and seek and save the lost the way Jesus did. This is what we'll examine in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

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Chapter 7. What did Jesus do? In recent years, it was popular in some sectors of the church to ask, what would Jesus do? And as often happens with catchphrases, it's been taken to extremes, everything from what did Jesus eat to what did Jesus drive. At first glance it might seem worthwhile to ask what Jesus would do in a particular circumstance, but the question has an inherent flaw. It opens the door to speculation.

The answer becomes open-ended so that people can make up whatever Jesus they want to fit into anything they would like to do. What would Jesus do? I'll tell you what he wouldn't do. He wouldn't condemn people because they want an abortion, and he wouldn't go around ramming religion down people's throats.

The better question is to ask, what did Jesus do? This confines our answers to the safe and reliable boundaries of the Bible. What did Jesus do when he confronted sinners? As we've seen from scripture, he made the issue one of righteousness rather than happiness. Jesus said that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, we would not enter the kingdom of heaven.

He told us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and assured us that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. It is the law that makes us thirst after a righteousness that we have no desire for. Before I was a Christian, I had as much desire for righteousness as a four-year-old boy has for the word bath.

The Bible says there is none that seeks after God. It says that men love darkness and hate the light, and they'll not come to the light lest their deeds be exposed. The only thing they drink in is iniquity like water.

But the night I was confronted with the spiritual nature of God's law and understood that God requires truth in the inward parts, and that he saw my thought life and considered lust to be the same as adultery and hatred the same as murder, I began to see that I was condemned and asked, what must I do to be made right? I began to thirst for righteousness. The law put salt on my tongue. It was a schoolmaster to bring me to Christ.

Law to the proud, grace to the humble. Earlier we looked at the fact that Jesus came to preach the gospel, the good news, to those who were spiritually poor, who were broken hearted over their sin. This is because God looks on the one who is poor and of a contrite heart, and who trembles at his word.

The gospel of grace is not for the proud, but for the humble. Only the sick need a physician, and only those who are convinced of the disease will appreciate and appropriate a cure. Therefore biblical evangelism is always, without exception, law to the proud and grace to the humble.

Never once did the Son of God give the good news, the cross, grace and mercy to a proud, arrogant, self-righteous person. Why? Because he always did those things that pleased the

Father. God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Everyone who is proud of heart, scripture says, is an abomination to the Lord. Only after the law has been used to humble a person is he then ready for the message of grace. As Charles Spurgeon stated, they must be slain by the law before they can be made alive by the gospel.

A. W. Pink said, just as the world was not ready for the New Testament before it received the old, just as the Jews were not prepared for the ministry of Christ until John the Baptist had gone before him with his claimant call to repentance, so the unsaved are in no condition today for the gospel to the law be applied to their hearts, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. It is a waste of time to sow seed on ground which has never been plowed or spaded, to present the vicarious sacrifice of Christ to those whose dominant passion is to take fill of sin, is to give that which is holy to the dogs. End of quote.

What did Jesus mean when he said not to give that which is holy to the dogs? To what was he referring when he said not to cast pearls before swine, lest they trample him under their feet and turn and rend you in pieces. The most precious pearl the church has is Christ crucified. Preach grace to the proud and watch what they do with it.

They'll trample the blood of the Savior under their feet with their false profession, and what's more, they'll become enemies of the gospel. If not physical, they will surely tear you in pieces verbally. Those who make a profession of faith without a humble heart, which the law produces, have the experience described in 2 Peter 2 verse 22.

According to the true proverb, a dog returns to his own vomit and a sow having washed to her wallowing in the mire. This is the tragic result of casting pearls of the gospel of grace to the proud, or what the bible calls dogs and swine. The false convert has never crucified the flesh with his passions and desires.

He, like the pig, must go back to wallowing in the mire. Pigs need to wallow in mire because they crave the slime to cool their flesh, and so it is with the false convert. He never repented, so his flesh is not dead with Christ and instead is burning with unlawful desire.

The heat of lust is too much for a sinful heart. He must go back to the filth. To avoid the tragedy of false conversions, we must follow the principle of using the law to break the hard heart and the gospel to heal the broken one.

So let's look briefly at the biblical examples of giving law to the proud and grace to the humble. In Luke 10 25 to 37, we read that a certain lawyer stood up and tested Jesus. This was not an attorney, but a professing expert in God's law.

He asked Jesus, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Now what did Jesus do? He gave him the law. Why? Because the man was proud, arrogant, and self-righteous. The spirit of his question was, And what do you think we have to do to get everlasting life? So Jesus asked him, What is written in the law? What is your reading of it? The man said, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

And your neighbor is yourself. And Jesus replied, This do and live. Then scripture says, But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who's my neighbor? The living Bible brings out more

clearly the effect of the law on the man.

The man wanted to justify his lack of love for some kinds of people. So he asked, Which neighbors? Well, he didn't mind Jews. He disliked Samaritans.

So Jesus then told him the story of what we call the good Samaritan, who wasn't good at all. In loving his neighbor as much as he loved himself, the Samaritan merely obeyed the basic requirements of God's law. And the spirituality of the law, what the law demands in truth, had the effect of stopping the lawyer's mouth.

He did not love his neighbor to that degree. The law was given to stop every mouth and leave the whole world guilty before God. Similarly, in Mark 10 verses 17 to 22, a rich young ruler came running to Jesus, knelt down before him and asked, Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? It would seem that his earnest and humble heart made him a prime candidate as a potential convert.

How would most of us react if someone came up and asked, How can I get everlasting life? We'd say, Oh, quickly say this prayer before you change your mind. But what did Jesus do with his potential convert? He didn't give him the message of God's grace. He didn't even mention the love of God.

Neither did he tell him about an abundant, wonderful new life. Instead, Jesus first corrected his understanding of the word good, saying that only God was good. Then he used God's standard of goodness, the moral law, to expose the man's hidden sin.

Jesus gave him five horizontal commandments, those having to do with his fellow man. When the man claimed to have kept them, revealing his self-righteousness, Jesus said, One thing you lack. And he used the essence of the first commandment, I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me, to show the man that he was a transgressor.

God was not foremost in his life. The rich young man loved his money, and no one can serve both God and money. The law brought to him the knowledge of sin.

Then the scriptures revealed that it was love that motivated Jesus to speak in this way to this rich young ruler. Every time we witness to someone, we should examine our motives. Do we love the sinner enough to make sure that his conversion is genuine? If Jesus had accepted at face value the young man's profession of righteousness, he might have led him into a false profession.

Instead, Jesus gave the law to this proud, self-righteous man. Then we see grace being given to the humble in the case of Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a leader of the Jews, whom Jesus called a teacher in Israel.

He was therefore thoroughly versed in God's law. He also had a humble heart, because he came to Jesus and acknowledged the deity of the Son of God. So Jesus gave the sincere seeker of truth the good news of the penalty being paid.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. And it was not foolishness to Nicodemus, but the power of God to salvation. Think of the woman caught in the very act of violating the seventh commandment.

She was condemned by the law for adultery. She had no excuse. Her guilty mouth was stopped, and a merciless law called for her blood.

About her traveling to Jesus, where she found mercy. Or consider Zacchaeus, a Jew whose words revealed that he knew the demands of the law. His actions also revealed that he had a humble heart.

No doubt there weren't many proud Pharisees climbing trees to see Jesus. A knowledge of sin via the law caused him to thirst for righteousness and humbly seek after the Savior. His willingness to pay restitution to any he had defrauded shows that his heart was prepared for grace.

Peter likewise used the principle of the law to the proud and grace to the humble. On the day of Pentecost, his audience was composed of devout men who were gathered to celebrate the giving of God's law on Mount Sinai. Peter told those Jews that they were lawless, that they had violated God's law by murdering Jesus.

He drove home that fact by saying, Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. It was then that they realized their sin was personal. They were cut to their heart and cried out for help.

Only after the law convicted them of their sinfulness did Peter offer them grace. The apostle Paul also followed the principle of law before grace. After warning that God would judge humanity by the moral law, Romans 2 verse 12, he tells his hearers that the work of the law is written on the human heart and that it concurs with the conscience.

Then he begins to use the law evangelistically, personalizing each commandment to his self-righteous hearers. You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? That's the eighth commandment. You who say do not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? Seventh commandment.

You who are poor idols, do you rob temples? Second commandment. You who make a boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For the name of God is blasphemed. Third commandment.

Among the Gentiles, because of you, as it is written. Romans 2 verse 21 to 24. Paul used the law to bring the knowledge of sin.

He also said, Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ. So make sure you follow Paul's example of how to witness biblically because he was merely following the way of the master. As Charles Spurgeon stated, only by imitating the spirit and the manner of the Lord Jesus shall we become wise to win souls.

The way of the master. I'm a strong believer in following in the footsteps of Jesus. I would never approach someone and say Jesus loves you.

It's totally unbiblical and there's no precedent for it in scripture. Neither I begin by saying, I'd like to talk to you about Jesus Christ. Rather, we need to bring the knowledge of the disease of sin using the law before we offer the cure of the gospel.

In John chapter four, we can see an example of personal witness as Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well. He started in the natural realm, talking about natural water, then transitioned to the spiritual, mentioning living water, brought conviction using the essence of the commandment, then he revealed himself as the Messiah. So when I approach someone, I may begin by talking about the weather, sports, or some current topic to get to know them for a couple of moments, maybe joking lightheartedly, and then I deliberately swing from the natural to the spiritual.

I do this by using gospel tracts. We sell millions of unique tracts that are appealing to the unsaved. They often even ask for more.

I may say, did you get one of these? It's a gospel tract. What do you think happens when somebody dies? Do you think there's an afterlife? Whatever he answers, I say, if there's a heaven, do you think you're good enough to go there? Almost everybody thinks they're headed for heaven because they're morally good. Proverbs 20 verse 6 even tells us that, quote, most men will proclaim their own goodness.

This is because they do not have the true definition of good. Romans 7, 12 tells us that the law is good. So I do what Jesus did with the rich young ruler who didn't understand what good meant, and what Paul did in Romans chapter 2. I take him through the ten commandments to show him God's definition of good.

I say, how many lies do you think you've told? He answers, oh, I've lost count. What does that make you? He says, I guess it'd make me a liar. People are not offended by such an approach because you're just asking them questions about their favorite topic themselves.

I say, have you ever stolen something regardless of its value? He says, no. I'll sometimes say with a smile, come on, you've just admitted to me that you're a liar. Have you ever stolen anything in your whole life, even if it was small? He says, well, yes, when I was young.

I say, what does that make you? He says, a thief. And I say, Jesus said whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has committed adultery already with her in his heart. Have you ever done that? He says, plenty of times.

Have you ever used God's name in vain? He says, yeah, I've tried to stop doing that. Do you know what you're doing? Instead of using a four-letter filth word to express disgust, you're using the name of the God who gave you life, and that's called blasphemy. And the Bible says the law will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

I'm not judging you, but by your own admission, you're a lying, thieving, blasphemous adulterer at heart, and you have to face God on judgment day. We've only looked at four of the ten commandments. Because the law is written on his heart, the man's conscience accuses him, acknowledging the truth of what I'm saying, and the law condemns him.

Then I ask, so if God judges you by that standard on the day of judgment, will he be innocent or guilty? He says, I'll be guilty. So do you think you'll go to heaven or hell? And the usual answer is heaven, probably a result of the modern gospel. So I ask, is that because you think God is good and he'll overlook your sins? He says, yeah, that's it.

He'll overlook my sins. I say, imagine that in a court of law. Let's say you've committed rape, murder, drug pushing, very serious crimes, and the judge says you're guilty, all the evidence is in.

Have you anything to say before I pass sentence? And you say, yes judge, I believe that you're a good man and you'll overlook my crimes. The judge will probably say, you're right about one thing, I am good, and because of that, I'm going to see that justice is done. Because of my goodness, I'm going to see that you're punished for your crimes.

The very thing that sinners are hoping will save them on the day of judgment, the goodness of God, will be the very thing that will condemn them. Because if God is good, he must by nature punish murderers, rapists, thieves, liars, blasphemers, and fornicators. God is going to punish sin wherever it's found.

So with this knowledge, the man is now able to understand. He's been given light that his sin is primarily vertical, that he has sinned against heaven. He realized that he's angered a holy God by violating his moral law, and that the wrath of God abides on him.

He can see that he's weighed in the balance of eternal justice and found wanting, so that he now understands the need for a sacrifice. He's therefore ready for the good news. He can now comprehend the incredible love of God in Jesus Christ.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. God demonstrates his own love toward us, and that while we're still sinners, Christ died for us. We broke the law, and Jesus paid our fine.

That means God can legally dismiss our case. It's as simple as that. When you use the law to show sinners their true state, be prepared for them to thank you.

For the first time in their lives, they'll see the Christian message as expressing love and concern for their eternal welfare, rather than merely proselytizing for a better lifestyle while on this earth. They'll begin to understand why they should be concerned about their eternal salvation. The law shows them they're condemned by God, and even makes them a little fearful, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Early in 2010, I was preaching open air at Huntington Beach to about 80 people. A man had been heckling me when his wife called out, I've given up on God, I was a Catholic, and I had eight miscarriages. I asked how many children she had, and said, have you thanked God for the two healthy children? Have you thanked him for your eyes? You can see, you're not blind.

Have you thanked him for your brain? You can think. Have you thanked him for this wonderful free country into which you were born, and for your handsome husband? When she boldly said, I thank science for my children, I said, it's God who opens the womb, not science. Do you think you're a good person? She said, I'm a very good person.

How many lies have you told in your life? Have you ever stolen something, irrespective of its value? She had admitted having had lied and stolen, so I spoke of judgment day, the reality of hell, the fact that even though we're guilty criminals, and that God is a righteous judge, Jesus stepped in and paid our fine for us. Because of the death and resurrection of the Savior, God can now legally dismiss our case. He can commute our death sentence upon our repentance and faith in

Jesus.

After I'd finished preaching, the man and his wife sought me out and gratefully accepted some literature. They weren't offended and even asked for my email address. I didn't ask for a decision from either of them.

I simply left them in the hands of a faithful creator, knowing that it's the gospel that's the power of God to salvation. Take the same approach with a Mormon, a Muslim, an intellectual, anyone with whom you want to witness. Most Christians think they have to bury their heads in the Quran or the Book of Mormon before they can effectively witness to these groups.

Not so. Just bury your head in the Bible. God's word is sufficient.

When you lift up your head, you should have your mind filled with truths such as these. I had not known sin but by the law. Now we know that whatsoever the law says, it says to those who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God.

The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The biblical gospel message is applicable to all people everywhere, whether they're happy or hurting, rich or poor, in the U.S. or overseas, in a high rise or a lowly hut, regardless of their beliefs or their lifestyles.

While we must be culturally sensitive, we do not need to tailor specific outreaches to each individual group because the disease of sin and the cure of the Savior apply to all humanity. God has given light to every man and the universal moral law is written on the heart of all peoples in all cultures. Must we use the law every time we witness? No.

Just keep in mind the biblical principle of Lord of the proud and grace to the humble. If the person is proud or self-righteous, he needs the law to humble him. You can determine pride by what comes out of the mouth.

Simply ask, do you think you're a good person? Most individuals think they deserve to go to heaven because they're good. If he says that he is, then you need to do what Jesus did in Mark 10, 17 and 18, taken through the Ten Commandments to show him he's not morally good and that he needs a Savior. If he's humble of heart, has a biblical understanding of the nature of sin and is genuinely contrite, he needs the gospel.

But people like this are very few and far between. Nor do we need to concern ourselves with the idea that we should befriend sinners and address their felt needs before speaking to them about salvation. It may take weeks, months or even years before we get around to talk to them about the subject of sin.

On the other hand, if we understand sin in its true light as enmity with God and grasp the urgency of the situation that our unregenerate friend could die tonight and face God's righteous judgment, would we not be motivated to show our friend her depravity in relationship to the law and to use the law to appeal to her conscience in order to bring her to repentance and salvation? Let's see how a felt needs approach would work in a court of law with a child molester. Take, for instance, the man who kidnapped a seven-year-old girl from her southern California home in 2002. He sexually molested her, strangled her to death, set her little body on fire and left her in the desert.

Imagine the judge saying the following during this man's trial. All the evidence is in. You're guilty.

However, I don't want to deal with your guilt at the moment. I want to first address your felt needs. Are you happy? Do you have an emptiness inside? Such talk would be absurd.

Any judge who asks such things would be thrown off the bench. The criminal is in court because he's committed a serious offense, and that is the only subject that should be addressed. Justice must be served.

The man must be punished for his terrible crime. His felt needs have nothing to do with the issue. After studying scripture, you should also know that the area of the battle is not the sinner's intellect, but his conscience.

So if you want to just argue, stay in the intellect. But if you want sinners to surrender to Jesus Christ, move the battle into the conscience, using the law of God to bring the knowledge of sin. That is what I did with a woman at Huntington Beach.

I could have spent ages arguing with her about whether science or God had given her two healthy children, but I instead asked her if she thought she was a good person, addressing her conscience. This is because the conscience is the God-given ally right in the heart of enemy territory. It bears witness with the commandments, convincing sinners to drop their defenses and surrender all.

Charles Spurgeon said regarding the importance of the weapon of the law, quote, lower the law and you dim the light by which man perceives his guilt. This is a very serious loss to the sinner rather than a gain, for it lessens the likelihood of his conviction and conversion. I say you have deprived the gospel of its ablest auxiliary, that's its most powerful weapon, when you have set aside the law.

You've taken away from it the schoolmasters to bring men to Christ. They will never accept grace until they tremble before a holy and just law. Therefore the law serves the most necessary purpose and must not be removed from its place.

End of quote. I'm so thankful to God for giving us such an incredible weapon in our battle for the lost. I so concur with John Wesley when he said of the law, quote, yea, love and value it for the sake of him from whom it came and of him to whom it leads.

Let it be thy glory and joy next to the cross of Christ. Declare its praise and make it honorable before all men. End of quote.

Some criticize the title of our television program, A Way of the Master, believing that it's a little presumptuous of us to put Jesus in a box and say that he evangelized a certain way. However he is our example. J.C. Ryle reminds us of the importance of following in his steps.

Quote, people will never set their faces decidedly toward heaven and live like pilgrims until they really feel that they're in danger of hell. Let us expound and beat out the ten commandments and show the length, breadth and depth and height of their requirements. This is the way of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount.

We cannot do better than to follow his plan. We may depend on it. Men will never come to Jesus and stay with Jesus and live for Jesus unless they really know why they are to come and what is their need.

Those whom the Spirit draws to Jesus are those whom the Spirit is convicted of sin. Without a thorough conviction of sin, men may seem to come to Jesus and follow him for a season, but they will soon fall away and return to the world. End of quote.

## Chapter 8

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Chapter 8 Raiders of the Contents of the Lost Ark Proverbs 6.23 tells us that the commandment is a lamp and the law is light. In 1980 when the Ten Commandments were removed from schools in the United States, it left a generation in the dark as to moral absolutes. We now live in a time when a breed of human beings can kill, steal, hate, dishonor their parents and revile God without qualms of conscience.

Today's generation doesn't just lack moral values of its grandparents, it doesn't have any moral values. In previous years there was a moral code even among criminals, that when you stole from someone you didn't blast them with your gun as you left. This is not nowadays.

We're daily reminded that what one generation permits the next embraces as normality. Years ago a woman would hesitate to walk in front of a group of men out of concern they would undress her with their eyes. These days her fear is that she'll be viciously raped, sodomized and murdered.

In light of these statistics we considered at the beginning of this book it would seem that the enemy has removed from the body of Christ its ability to be salt and light in a dark and decaying world. Jesus warned that the salt lost its savor it would be good for nothing except to be trampled underfoot by men. This is why so many hold the church in contempt.

The world has trampled us underfoot and is reaping terrible consequences. We're living in times of gross darkness but remember this is not a god-forsaken world. It's a world that has forsaken God.

He can and his great sovereignty open Satan's clenched fist and drop the riches of revival into the lap of the church. Eric W Hayden in his book Spurgeon on Revival wrote, quote, almost every book dealing with spiritual awakening or a revival of history begins by describing the pre-revival situation in approximately the same words. For instance you'll read such words as these, the darkness before the dawn, the sleep of midnight and gross darkness or desolation and decay.

W.T Street who was a child of the Welsh revival in 1859 when writing of the latter revival in the 20th century said of it, note how invariably the revival is preceded by a period of corruption, end of quote. There is great hope for the masses of false converts who sit within the church. It's a rich field of evangelistic endeavor.

The fact that they're still there reveals they're open to the things of God. History shows us that virtually every major revival of the past has been birthed out of a great awakening of those who thought they were saved but were not. I've seen this teaching awaken many false converts to their true state.

God has soundly saved them and they've begun to be witnesses as they've been commanded to be. Enemy attack. How did this problem arise in the church in the first place? How was it that so many tears have been sown among the wheat? In Matthew 13 25 Jesus tells us why it happened and who was behind it.

Quote, but while men slept his enemy came and sowed tears among the wheat and went his way, end of quote. While the church was asleep the enemy did this. It's now time for followers of Christ to awaken out of our stupor and get back to biblical evangelism.

When speaking of using the law as a schoolmaster to bring sinners to Christ, Martin Luther said, quote, this now is the Christian teaching and preaching which God be praised we know and possess and it's not necessary at present to develop it further but only to offer the admonition that it be maintained and christened in with all diligence for Satan has attacked it hard and strong from the beginning until present and gladly would he completely extinguish it and tread it underfoot, end of quote. Luther also stated, quote, Satan the god of dissension stirs up daily new sects and last of all which of all other I should never have foreseen or once suspected he has raised up a sect such as teach that men should not be terrified by the law but gently exhorted by the preaching of the grace of Christ, end of quote. In addition to sowing tears among the wheat Satan has duped the church into believing that it has advanced by getting decisions for Christ without using the law.

We're in a very real war and a very real enemy who has invaded our ranks and stripped the gospel of its power. The ark has been raided. Remember that in the old testament the ark of the covenant signified God's presence.

It was not the ark that God prized, it was what the ark contained. Have you ever wondered why God manifested himself in such a glorious way that the priests in the house of the Lord couldn't minister in first kings 8, 10 and 11? It happened when the priests brought in the ark of the covenant. Scripture tells us what the ark contained, quote, there was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there in Horeb, end of quote.

It seems that God so esteems his law that he couldn't withhold his glorious presence from the temple. The psalmist didn't say oh how I love your ark. Paul didn't say I delight in the ark of God.

It was God's holy law that they loved and revered. The law was written with the finger of God as an expression of his holy perfect character. We as individuals and as the church are the temple of the Lord and when we give the moral law its rightful place perhaps we'll truly see the power of his presence, something that causes demons to tremble.

Satan hates this teaching for a number of reasons. It awakens false converts to the true state. It puts the fear of God into the heart of Christians, helping them to walk in holiness.

It gives them great motivation to reach out to the lost, knowing that the issue is not merely the happiness of sinners in this life but their eternal welfare in the light of a wrath-filled creator. As Luther said, the enemy has attacked the use of the law and evangelism hard and strong from the beginning until the present. However, our great consolation is the fact that this is God's teaching and I believe that it's his timing to bring it to light.

The law magnifies grace and opens sinners eyes to the gospel so that the cross makes sense and isn't that our greatest desire for God to be glorified and sinners saved from hell? We want to see genuine worldwide revival so that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. It was A.W. Pink who said, it is true that many are praying for worldwide revival but it would be more timely and more scriptural for prayer to be made to the Lord at the harvest that he would raise up and thrust forth laborers who would fearlessly and faithfully

preach those truths which are calculated to bring about a revival. I firmly believe that the use of the law and evangelism is one of those truths and if we want to see a great harvest of souls in these last days we must hold on to this truth with unwavering conviction, free from their blood.

If you experience a problem with muscle pain a well-meaning physician might prescribe the approved drug Larissa. Before you take it however consider these possible side effects swelling of the face, mouth, lips, gums, tongue or neck, trouble with breathing, rash, hives or blisters, swelling of hands, legs and feet, dizziness, sleepiness, blurred vision, weight gain, trouble concentrating, dry mouth, feeling high, depression and suicidal thoughts or actions, attempting to commit suicide. Sometimes the cure is worse than the disease.

The wonderful plan message promises a cure to the world's ailments and millions have gladly swallowed its message unaware of its terrible side effects in this life and in the next. Think of what that message has produced. Those who say they know the Lord but kill their children in the womb.

Those who think that Jesus sinned, who do not believe in a real enemy, who regularly lie, steal, fornicate and have lustful thoughts. Think of the multitudes who'll cry Lord, Lord and hear the horrific words I never knew you. Then there is the added side effect of those we erroneously call backsliders who never slid forward in the first place, who fall away from the faith and face a latter end worse than the beginning.

May the following letter written by a pastor stir your heart to do all that you can to avoid leading anyone into a false conversion. Quote, Dear Brother Ray, I've been a pastor for 25 years. I always thought I was doing a reasonably good job, kind of like the folks who consider themselves good people.

I had tried to preach what I thought was the whole counsel of God. I prayed over the years with many people to accept Jesus and make him Lord of their lives. My wife Judy and I moved to Rudoso, New Mexico about six years ago to plant a church.

Shortly after arriving I was convicted that something was horribly wrong in my ministry. I read the scriptures and prayed earnestly that God would show me what was wrong. The feeling continued to grow and I became depressed and moody.

I asked Judy to pray for me and explain my problem. I didn't know if this was the Holy Spirit convicting me or Satan attacking. She prayed that God would reveal the cause of my depression and make himself clear as he revealed any problem with my ministry for him.

That night had a most terrifying, realistic, blood-chilling nightmare any man has ever had. I'm a Vietnam veteran and I know a little about nightmares. Nothing in my experience has ever come close, nor do I ever want it to, to the horror of that night.

I dreamed that it was judgment day and I was standing right next to the throne of God. I noticed that on my left and on my right hand were pastors as far as I could see. I thought this was odd that the Lord would reserve this front row space for pastors only.

I looked across the space of only a few yards and there were millions, maybe billions of people, yet I could see each one of their eyes staring at me. As I studied this group I noticed that I knew many of them from the times at the altar or ones who sat under my teaching. I was pleased to see

that they'd made it to heaven but confused because they didn't look happy.

They looked very angry and hateful. Then I heard the voice of the Lord say, Away I never knew you. I was suddenly frightened that what I was seeing were those who thought they were saved.

Then I saw all of them pointing a finger at each one of us pastors and saying together in one voice that shook my soul, We sat in your church and thought we were saved. Why didn't you tell us we were lost? Tears were pouring down my face and the faces of all those pastors. I watched as one by one those people were cast into hell.

One and then another and another and another until they were all gone. I died inside as each one screamed in agony and gnashed their teeth cursing us as they went into the lake of fire. Then I was looking to the face of Jesus and he said to me, Is this the part where I'm supposed to say well done my good and faithful servant? I woke up with a scream and my heart pounding and I was begging Jesus to forgive me.

I died a million deaths that night. Since that night I've done two things on a daily basis. I do everything I can to preach the law before grace and hope the conviction of sin will bring a sinner to true salvation.

The other thing I do is pray for every person I've ever preached to asking God to repair any damage I've done. I also never believe anyone when they tell me they're saved. It's my duty to challenge them and search out the solidness of their salvation.

Your ministry and materials have been a great blessing to me. I'm learning to be more effective and confident as I teach others how to share their faith by using the law. I've seen several people saved who thought they were saved as I've used the Way of the Master material to teach them evangelism.

I do want to hear those words well done my good and faithful servant and thanks to you and your team I have a better chance of hearing them. Thank you. I just wanted to let you know some pastors are waking up to the truth.

The desire of my heart is to please God. I pray that my days of being a man pleaser are over along with the nightmares. I also pray that God will use me to bring other pastors into the truth of the gospel message so that they'll not have to face the nightmare that I did.

Pastor Steve Krenz, First Church of God, Waco, Texas. Since the fall of man there's been a great battle for the souls of men and women. Those who have gone before us in past centuries have not had an easy task, but they knew that if they followed according to the pattern of God's word with his help they would eventually deliver sinners from death and hell.

If they sowed in tears they would reap in joy. They wanted above all things to be true and faithful witnesses. If they preached the whole counsel of God they'd be innocent from the blood of all men.

These ministries of men such as Wesley, Wycliffe, Whitfield, Spurgeon and many others were greatly effective in reaching the lost. The key was in the careful and thorough use of the Lord to prepare the way for the gospel. We are wise to follow in their footsteps.

Some point to Paul's statement that I might by all means save some and say we're not confined to using the Lord to reach the lost. We can use any and all means to reach the unsaved. But note the context of Paul's words.

Quote, to the Jews I became a Jew that I might win the Jews. To those who are under the law as under the law that I might win those who are under the law. To those who are without the law as without the law, not being without law toward God but under law toward Christ that I might win those who are without the law.

To the weak I became as weak that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some. End of quote.

Paul was saying as one preacher put it that when he saw a Jew he hid his ham sandwich behind his back. The New Living Translation states it this way. Quote, I try to find common ground with everyone doing everything I can to save some.

His all means is in the context of godly congeniality for the sake of the sin of salvation. Not a license to use any and every unbiblical means to reach the lost. If you have questions about respected ministries that have preached the modern gospel may I respectfully suggest that you do what the Bereans did with Paul's teaching and what I did when I first discovered these principles.

Search the scriptures daily to see if these things are so. Please do that for the sake of eternal souls. If the principles mentioned in this book are indeed biblical then drop every man-made method and reach the lost according to the god-given pattern.

If you're a pastor you have a unique and wonderful calling. You are to preach Christ warning every man that you may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. You have been entrusted with the eternal souls of precious human beings.

In Hebrews 13:17 scripture speaks of that trust and of its fearful accountability telling the flock that leaders watch out for your souls and those who must give an account. Let them do so with joy and not grief. Imagine the unspeakable grief of standing before almighty god and hearing members of your flock saying but my pastor never warned me.

Imagine hearing them cry lord lord and seeing them cast out of heaven into hell forever. The size of our churches mean nothing if they prove to be full of false converts. May each of us give an account with joy and not with grief.

Thank you for being open-minded and allowing me to share my heart with you. May god continue to bless you and grant you your heart's deepest desires as you delight yourself in him.

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