

Religious Traditions

God has only one salvation plan; but we Christians have many: Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, and on through alphabet! In the year 2000 there were “150 major ecclesiastical traditions and 20,800 distinct denominations, dioceses, jurisdictions, missions, assemblies, and fellowships in the church” (World Christian Encyclopedia, Oxford University). It is no wonder then that we haven’t yet convinced the world that the Father has sent his Son who prayed for that in John 17:20-21:

My prayer is not for these alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through *their message*, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that *the world may believe that you have sent me*.

The word “message” here refers to what we believe is God’s salvation plan: so we call it just that; God’s Salvation Plan We have outlined this plan in two articles available on our website (listed below): a summarized version, “Good News!—Final Edition!,” and in a version with all of the supporting scriptural passage included, “God’s Salvation Plan.”

in spite of the differences, even contradictions in our views of some aspects of God’s Salvation Plan; God has been and is working through our organizations mightily, for Isaiah 55:10–11 reads: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it ... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire.”

Without getting deeply into theological views, this article will deal with several groups of Christian Churches in order to show why their teachings are not fully biblical. To speak negatively of any religious tradition is to be accused of being “judgmental”, but Paul indicates that this is a legitimate use of God’s word: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16); and “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). So, refusing to condemn what the Scriptures condemn is to fail to use the Scriptures for one of their most essential purposes.

Another positive reason for pointing out negative aspects of traditions is that there is no basis in the Scriptures for such divisions—God’s salvation plan is plainly revealed in the Bible! So we really do need to deal with this appalling division among us; and, surprisingly, we can do so without compromising one biblically-sound element in our traditions! Surely when a well-intentioned tradition is confronted with new insights into truth that challenge any part of it, our choice must be to follow truth, not tradition!

Every Christian group believes that they teach the message Jesus referred to in his prayer in the Upper Room; and those we will consider represent most of the Christians in the world Before starting this treatment of Christian groups however, this writer found the following information about all of the religions of the world on the Internet from the site called: “Religions of the World.”

According to David Barrett et al, editors of the "*World Christian Encyclopedia: A comparative survey of churches and religions—AD 30 to 2200*," there are 19 major world religions which are subdivided into a total of 270 large religious groups, and many smaller ones. 34,000 separate Christian groups have been identified in the world. "*Over half of them are independent churches that are not interested in linking with the big denominations.*"

The statistics here differ from those given above; but both give us some idea of the tremendous division among Christian Churches. Each of fifteen groups listed in the foregoing article have less than 6% of the world’s religions. They are: Tribal Religions; Shamanism, Animism; Atheists; New religions; Sikhism; Judaism; Spiritism; Baha’i Faith; Confucianism; Jainism; Zoroastrianism; Shinto; Taoism; and Wicca.

The following chart contrasts the six most numerous religions of the world.

Religion	Date Founded	Sacred Texts	Membership	% of World
Christianity	30 CE	The Bible	2,039 million	32% (dropping)
Islam	622 CE	Qur'an & Hadith	1,226 million	19% (growing)
Hinduism	1,500 BCE with truly ancient roots	Bhagavad-Gita, Upanishads, & Rig Veda	828 million	13% (stable)
No religion		None	775 million	12% (dropping)
Chinese folk religion	270 BCE	None	390 million	6%
Buddhism	523 BCE	The Tripitaka & Sutras	364 million	6% (stable)

In Ephesians 4:15, Paul wrote about “speaking the truth in love.” It is in that spirit that we call attention to the failures of the following Christian groups to fully reflect God’s Salvation Plan.

Clergy-controlled Churches

The early Christian Church went through an amazingly complex period in which an almost unbelievable number of groups sought to be the Church. Out of this milieu the Roman Catholic, Eastern and Western Orthodox, Anglicans, Episcopalians, and some other groups of churches controlled by their leaders have endured.

Down through the centuries many members of these churches have been, and many still are in Christ. This is true, however, not because of their membership in a church; for salvation is by the grace of God alone: “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

As valuable as it is to worship the Lord with those of “like precious faith,” there is no biblical basis for the idea that everyone in any organization is in Christ,; or that to be in Christ one must be a member of any particular organization. These ideas, believed by these churches and others who share this idea, are but expressions of the tendency of sinful men to limit the grace of God to their own group, for their own self-centered purposes.

To believe that salvation is by membership in an organization and/or by rituals or sacraments, is to totally miss the clear-cut biblical distinction that salvation is by grace through faith, as mentioned just above in Ephesians 2:8. Those in this group of churches, however, who distinguish between mortal and venial sins are closer to recognizing the three-fold nature of sin than groups that don’t.

Although he didn’t arrive of the scene until the fourth century, we look at the effect Augustine has had on the history of this segment of Christianity.

The following is an excerpt from the Wikipedia Internet site:

Aurelius Augustinus, Augustine of Hippo, or Saint Augustine (November 13, 354—August 28, 430) was a philosopher and theologian, and was bishop of the North African city of Hippo Regius for the last third of his life. Augustine is one of the most important

figures in the development of Western Christianity, and is considered to be one of the church fathers. He framed the concepts of original sin and just war.

In Roman Catholicism and the Anglican Communion, he is a saint and pre-eminent Doctor of the Church, and the patron of the Augustinian religious order. Many Protestants, especially Calvinists, consider him to be one of the theological fathers of Reformation teaching on salvation and grace. In the Eastern Orthodox Church he is a saint, and his feast day is celebrated annually on June 15, though a minority are of the opinion that he is a heretic, primarily because of his statements concerning what became known as the filioque clause. Among the Orthodox he is called Blessed Augustine, or St. Augustine the Blessed. "Blessed" here does not mean that he is less than a saint, but is a title bestowed upon him as a sign of respect. The Orthodox do not remember Augustine so much for his theological speculations as for his writings on spirituality. In addition he believed in Papal supremacy.

Augustine, who prior to his dramatic conversion was sexually immoral, over-reacted and was influential in establishing the tradition of forbidding priests to marry, though this had been biblically sanctioned for centuries. This unnatural tradition has had miserable consequences in the lives of many, and is causing the Roman Catholic Church great embarrassment and financial penalties.

Augustine's view of this matter was not biblical; but by taking his view to such an extreme he exemplified a tendency that has been repeated many times since in church history, even by those whose insights have been scripturally valid. Each of the insights in God's Salvation Plan are not only scripturally valid, but are balanced. Some of them are the same views that reformers have seen; but have taken to such an extreme that it became heresy. In our consideration of other Christian groups we will encounter other examples of taking a true insight to an extreme that throws biblical truth off-balance.

Rather than leaving our consideration of Augustine on a negative note, here is a quote from him: "Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love, and the future to God's Providence."

Lutheran Churches

These churches follow the writings of Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, that challenged the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, first in Europe, then world-wide. The following summary is also from the Wikipedia Internet site, with the numeric references to notes removed:

Martin Luther (November 10, 1483–February 18, 1546) was a German monk, theologian, and Protestant Reformer. He is often considered the founder of Protestantism.

Luther's theology challenged the authority of the papacy by holding that the Bible is the sole source of religious authority and that all baptized Christians are a general priesthood. According to Luther, salvation was attainable only by faith in Jesus as the Messiah, a faith unmediated by the church. These ideas helped to inspire the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

Luther's translation of the Bible into the German vernacular, making it more accessible to ordinary people, had a tremendous impact on the church and on German culture. The translation also furthered the development of a standard version of the German language, added several principles to the art of translation, and influenced the translation of the English King James Bible. His hymns inspired the development of congregational singing within Christianity. His marriage to Katharina von Bora set a model for the practice of clerical marriage within Protestantism.

Much scholarly debate has concentrated on Luther's writings about the Jews. His statements that Jews' homes should be destroyed, their synagogues burned, money confiscated and liberty curtailed were revived and used in propaganda by the Nazis in 1933–45. As a result of this and his revolutionary theological views, his legacy remains controversial.

Luther's views on the treatment of Jews were certainly extremely non-biblical; and his rejection of the Book of James as a "book of straw" for saying that "... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17), is a case of taking a valid truth "salvation is by faith," to such an extreme that it became error. Yet only in eternity will we be able to adequately assess the tremendous impact his life and ministry had on building the Kingdom of God.

Calvinistic Churches

These churches follow the writings of John Calvin. Most, if not all Baptist churches are Calvinistic, many of them being congregational—recognizing no human oversight of the local congregation. The following except is again from Wikipedia:

John Calvin (July 10, 1509–May 27, 1564) was a French Protestant theologian during the Protestant Reformation and was a central developer of the system of Christian theology called Calvinism or Reformed theology. In Geneva, his ministry both attracted other Protestant refugees and over time made that city a major force in the spread of Reformed theology. He is renowned for his teachings and writings, in particular for his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

A diligent student who excelled at his studies, Calvin was "remarkably religious" even as a young man.

Calvin's father was an attorney and in 1523 sent his fourteen-year-old son to the University of Paris to study humanities and law. By 1532, he had attained a Doctor of Laws degree at Orléans. It is not clear when Calvin converted to Protestantism, though in the preface to his commentary on Psalms, Calvin said:

God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame.... Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off [legal] studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor.

Calvin ... found it necessary to flee Paris ... settled for a time in Basel, where in 1536 he published the first edition of his *Institutes*. After a brief and covert return to France in 1536, ... [he again left, and] settled in Geneva. After being expelled from the city, he served as a pastor in Strasbourg from 1538 until 1541, before returning to Geneva, where he lived until his death in 1564.

Presbyterians are characterized by a graded system of representative ecclesiastical bodies that exercise legislative and judicial powers in their church government and are traditionally Calvinistic in doctrine.

This groups' failure to understand and admit that deliberate sin severs one's personal relationship with God, their failure to adequately stress that continued fellowship with God is dependent on continuing to "walk in the light," (due to Calvin's over-emphasis on the sovereignty of God), with his lack of that emphasis on personal responsibility, resulting in the concept of so-called "eternal security," has no doubt caused many to lose their salvation.

If Baptists/Calvinists would understand that sin is a three-fold problem, grace is a three-fold work that solves it, for the glory of God; and that all of us really do need the second and third works of salvation grace, this tragic result could even yet be greatly reduced.

Yet the fact that many Baptists/Calvinists live godly lives, not sinning deliberately, is not denied, and that Calvin made a tremendous contribution to the Kingdom of God; so only eternity will tell how many will be in heaven as a result.

Wesleyan Churches

These churches follow the writings of John Wesley. The following excerpt is again from Wikipedia:

John Wesley (June 28 [O.S. June 17] 1703–March 2, 1791) was an Anglican minister and Christian theologian who was an early leader in the Methodist movement. Methodism had three rises: the first at Oxford University with the founding of the "Holy Club"; the second while Wesley was parish priest in Savannah, Georgia; and the third in London after Wesley's return to England. The movement took form from its third rise in the early 1740s with Wesley, along with others, itinerant field preaching and the subsequent founding of religious societies for the formation of believers. This was the first widely successful evangelical movement in the United Kingdom. Wesley's Methodist connection included societies throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland before spreading to other parts of the English-speaking world and beyond. He divided his religious societies further into classes and bands for intensive accountability and religious instruction. Methodists, under Wesley's direction, became leaders in many social justice issues of the day including prison reform and abolitionism movements. Wesley's strength as a theologian lay in his ability to combine seemingly opposing theological stances. His greatest theological achievement was his promotion of what he termed "Christian perfection," or holiness of heart and life. Wesley insisted that in this life, the Christian could come to a state where the love of God, or perfect love, reigned supreme in one's heart. His evangelical theology, especially his understanding of Christian perfection, was firmly grounded in his sacramental theology. He continually insisted on the general use of the means of grace (prayer, Scripture, meditation, Holy Communion, etc.) as the means by which God transformed the believer. Throughout his life, Wesley remained within the Church of England and insisted that his movement was well within the bounds of the Anglican Church. His maverick use of church policy put him at odds with many within the Church of England, though toward the end of his life he was widely respected.

The source of error in the Wesleyan tradition can be seen in an examination of several paragraphs in John Wesley's sermon, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. On page 1, just after point 3, he wrote:

I saw, that "simplicity of intention, and purity of affection," one design in all we speak or do, and one desire ruling all our tempers, are indeed "the wings of the soul," without which she can never ascend to the mount of God.

Then, well below under point 19, he wrote:

The best of men still need Christ in his priestly office, to atone for their omissions, their short-comings, (as some not improperly speak,) their mistakes in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds. For these are all deviations from the perfect law, and consequently need an atonement. Yet that they are not properly sins, we apprehend may appear from the words of St. Paul, "He that loveth, hath fulfilled the law; for love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). Now, mistakes, and whatever infirmities necessarily flow from the corruptible state of the body, are noway contrary to love; nor therefore, in the Scripture sense, sin.

Here, after admitting that "the best of men" need an "atonement" for their "deviations from the perfect law," he errs in his application of the quotation from Paul. He fails to see that the law, God's will, that requires and enables "simplicity of intention and purity of affection," does not enable or

require performance beyond our knowledge, ability, and opportunity—essential elements in obedience.

Wesley then applies this inadequate understanding in the very next paragraph—the one in which he gives his valuable, history-making definition of voluntary transgressions.

To explain myself a little farther on this head: (1.) Not only sin, properly so called, (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law,) but sin, improperly so called, (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown,) needs the atoning blood.... [but] (4.) I believe, a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions. (5.) Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please: I do not, for the reasons above-mentioned.

He errs in saying that although an involuntary transgression needs the atoning blood; we are not to call it a sin! Our intention can be right, and our affection can be pure, but our knowledge is limited, so we do commit/omit sins of ignorance: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12, KJV). Wesley said that he did not call “such transgressions” sin, but the Bible does.

Leviticus 4:22-23 reads:

When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of the LORD his God, he is guilty. When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect.

Hebrews 9:7 reads:

But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

1 John 5:16 also speaks of a sin that “does not lead to death.”

As the Holy Spirit enlightens us, we are enabled to recognize sins of ignorance and deal with them. So Perfect Love enables sincere intention and pure affection; but does not produce perfect performance, or there would be no need or way for us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord” (2 Peter 3:18).

Consider the relationship of a father and his young daughter in a case like this: While working under a blistering sun, the father sees her bringing a glass of water to him. He sees, however, what she does not, that her dirty fingers are not just around the glass but in it. Does he refuse the water? By no means! He lovingly rewards her intention and affection by accepting the drink; knowing full well that as he teaches her about such things as germs, her performance will improve.

Was her performance right? No, it was not! Did she need forgiveness? No, because her intention and affection were right and her father understood that; just as our Father understands our intention and affection, while he sees our flawed performance, and accepts it—until he shows us that it is flawed; at which time we must deal with these sins of ignorance.

This failure to recognize sins of ignorance that remain in all of us until we see Christ, means that those who claim that they are enabled by grace to not sin at all, must avoid praying, as Jesus commanded in Luke 11:2-4: “When you pray, say: ‘Father ... Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.’ ” Their preference to pray “forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” as in Matthew 6:12, doesn’t avoid the problem, for both of these instructions deal with sins of ignorance. Then, consider the prayer from the Anglican Common Book of Prayer, which Wesleyans have prayed for centuries, which reads, “Forgive us our

trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"! How can "trespasses" be anything but sins?

What devastating effects this profession of sinlessness has had in misrepresenting the biblically mandated experience of humble heart holiness only eternity will tell! How many of those in other traditions, seeing the obvious sins of ignorance of those professing this experience, have been convinced that if "holiness" is sinlessness, it is not attainable in this life, and have been turned away from seeking true, humble heart holiness?

Then there are the devastating effects of teaching a required sinless experience upon those within the Wesleyan tradition. Countless, if not every adherent to this tradition who has sought and claimed this experience, has soon come to the realization that they have done something wrong. What should be done now? Many, have decided that they really didn't get the experience so have "hit the altar" again to "really" get "sanctified," and "started over," often doing so many times. Far too many others, however, have just given up at this point and ceased serving the Lord. How tragic the consequences!

How much more biblical and soul-saving it would be to teach them that Christ, our sinless sacrifice for sin, is also our High Priest who is interceding for God's grace to mercifully cover the sins of ignorance of those in him until the Holy Spirit reveals to them that they have sinned. Therefore, this awareness that they have done wrong is not God condemning them; but is the Holy Spirit guiding them as his child to recognize, confess and forsake this now recognized sin. He does this in order to teach them that now they can trust him to cleanse them of its guilt so they can go on their way rejoicing; having grown in grace and become more like their Lord!

Just this positive not in closing the account. John Wesley was, and those who follow his views are strongly influenced by the wonderful songs of his brother Charles.

Pentecostal / Charismatic Churches

We turn again to Wikipedia to introduce this group of churches.

Pentecostalism is a movement within Evangelical Christianity that places special emphasis on the direct personal experience of God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as shown in the Biblical account of the Day of Pentecost. Pentecostalism is similar to the Charismatic movement, but developed earlier and separated from mainstream denominations. Charismatic Christians, at least in the early days of the movement, tended to remain in their respective denominations.

The majority of Pentecostals believe that one must be saved by believing and accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior for the remission of sins and be water baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Pentecostals also typically believe, like most other evangelicals, that the Bible has definitive authority in matters of faith.

There are two large streams of Pentecostal churches. To the first group, speaking in tongues is the sign of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, and is not necessary for salvation but is indicative of a heart truly submitted to God's will. This is reported to create a 'spiritual hierarchy' in the church which often resembles early forms of Gnosticism which the Apostle Paul described extensively in his epistles. The second group emphasizes a salvation message based on Acts 2:38 which says that a person needs to repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and then receive the Holy Spirit. Receiving the Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation and is accompanied by speaking in tongues.

Because many Pentecostal denominations are descended from Methodism and the Methodist Holiness Movement, Pentecostal soteriology is generally Arminian rather than Calvinist.

The Pentecostal movement finds its historic roots in the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California, USA from 1904 to 1906.

Most Pentecostal denominations can trace their roots to the Azusa Street Revival or were strongly influenced by it.

One of the most prominent distinguishing characteristics of Pentecostalism from the rest of Evangelicalism is its emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. Most Pentecostals believe that everyone who is genuinely saved has the Holy Ghost. But unlike most other Christians they believe that there is a second work of the Holy Ghost called the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in which the Holy Ghost dwells more fully in them, and which opens a believer up to a closer fellowship with God and empowers them for Christian service.

The world's largest Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God, holds to the belief in Trinitarian theology in accordance with mainstream Protestantism as does the Elim Pentecostal Church, Church of God, the Church of God in Christ, The Apostolic Church, and the Foursquare Church.

Most Pentecostal churches hold the belief that preaching the Gospel to unbelievers is extremely important. "The Great Commission" to spread the "Good News of the Kingdom of God", spoken by Jesus directly before his Ascension, is perceived as one of the most important commands that Jesus gave.

According to a recent study, 40% of pentecostals or more did not speak or pray in tongues, in 6 out of 10 counties surveyed.

The charismatic movement began with the adoption of certain beliefs typical of those held by Pentecostal Christians—specifically what are known as the biblical charisms or spiritual gifts: glossolalia (speaking in tongues), prophesying, supernatural healing, etc.—by those within mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. Many charismatic Christians went on to form separate churches and denominations.

Though charismatic theology finds its roots in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, charismatics can now be found within numerous theological movements and in multiple denominations.

Charismatic is an umbrella term used to describe those Christians who believe that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit seen in the first century Christian Church, such as miracles, prophecy, and glossolalia (speaking in other tongues or languages), are available to contemporary Christians and may be experienced and practiced today. The word charismatic is derived from the Greek word χάρισμα ("gift," itself derived from χάρις, "grace" or "favor") which is the term used in the Bible to describe a wide range of supernatural experiences (especially in 1 Corinthians 12-14).

Often confused with Pentecostalism (which inspired it), charismatic Christianity tends to differ in key aspects: most charismatics reject the preeminence given by Pentecostalism to glossolalia, reject what they consider to be legalism sometimes associated with Pentecostalism, and often stay in their existing denominations such as Roman Catholic Charismatics.

Because of the continual cross-over between Pentecostalism and the modern charismatic movement, it is increasingly difficult to speak of charismatics and Pentecostals as being part of separate movements. Yet because neither movement is monolithic, it is inaccurate to speak of them as being one movement.

In the 1960s and 1970s there was a renewed interest in the supernatural "gifts of the Spirit" in mainstream churches such as the Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Anglican, and Catholic churches.

While there are many charismatics within established denominations, many have left or have been forced out and have joined either more progressive Pentecostal churches or formed their own churches or denominations.

Just this note as we close the accounts of this group as well as the others. Because those in this group use the word "Pentecostal" and the words "Baptism with the Holy Spirit," to refer to speaking in a "tongue" requiring interpretation, many hesitate to use these terms in their biblical sense. The "tongues" spoken at Pentecost were understood by everyone present; with no need for an interpreter. The word "tongues" is used only two other times in Acts. In Acts 10:46 we read that they were "praising God"; and Acts 19:6 says they "prophesied." In none of these accounts is there any reference to an interpreter. So, using these terms for a Corinthian-like experience is not biblical; nor is the claim that "tongues speaking" is an evidence of grace. The biblical evidence is love!

One of the most amazing aspects of God's grace is that there are no doubt some, hopefully many, in each of the above-mentioned groups who are in Christ! If so, it means that in each individual case God's mercy is covering our failure to fully grasp his plainly revealed salvation plan; so we are being redeemed in spite of our ignorance!

But surely our ignorance must not be allowed to continue. Jesus taught us to pray in Luke 11:2, "May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." He has made his will known, and the destiny of countless souls is at stake; so it's certainly time for action!—yours and mine!

But there is an awesome, negative result possible from our failure to fully proclaim God's Salvation Plan. Preacher, missionary, teacher, child of God, in the light of the scriptural support for the insights in this plan, are you willing to risk the possibility of having an experience like this at the judgment bar? Someone you have influenced to believe your erroneous tradition screams out at the Judgment Bar: "But you said ... and I believed you, and now I am lost forever!"

On the positive side, we believe that God, in spite of our failures, has used us in a marvelous way, and can use us even more effectively as catalysts in bringing world-wide revival! It would be wonderful if the acceptance of these insights would be by organizational decrees; but this would be extraordinary indeed; for history records otherwise. Peer pressure to maintain the "status quo" exists in all groups, and is a tremendous force that has little or no relation to truth. It works for good at times and for evil at other times.

Either the insights in God's Salvation Plan are true, or they are not. If they are true, and we fail to accept and proclaim them, we are following tradition rather than truth! Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will help us all, as individuals, then organizations, to align our views and our lives more closely to biblical revelation; so that by coming to agreement on what our Lord meant by the word "message," God can use our unity for convincing the world that the Father has sent him.

Hopefully, a more biblical understanding of the terms "sin," "grace," and "faith" in our understanding of God's Salvation Plan has made it possible to better understand the points at which something in each of these groups' traditions is not completely biblical. We believe, however, that these traditions can be adjusted to this plan without compromising one biblically-based tenet of their current doctrine.

There are evidences that world-wide evangelism is becoming much more effective through the use of short-wave radio, mass publications, literature distribution, and newer technologies such as the use of the Jesus film. By these means, evangelical Christians are reaching many more people for

our Lord these days than were reached by even the most effective previous efforts. These factors mean that the potential for kingdom building ahead is unprecedented! If Evangelicals can be led of God to agree on what the “message” means, it seems that all of the necessary human elements would be in place for the greatest advance in kingdom building yet seen.

In the past, far too many of us have been guilty of taking our “ease in Zion”—failing to “press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me (Philippians 3:12). Salvation is not to be thought of as a backward-looking experience, but as an ever forward-looking one!

Hopefully, even some who are not called “Christians,” but have a biblical faith in Christ, will join us in this effort. We are all descendents of the same parents, so it seems reasonable to believe, as Jesus prayed and Paul wrote, that God has one salvation plan for us all.

Reader, if the Holy Spirit has enabled you to see that these insights are true, you are faced with a simple, but serious, eternity-influencing choice: to follow your traditional view, or to walk in the light of these insights. A change in your views is humbling, especially if your are in a position of leadership, and being a witness to your peers may involve considerable risk; but the cost of embracing new truth God reveals to us does not compare with the awful consequences of not embracing it. And the earthly cost of this change will not even be a fleeting remembrance when, finally, one day, faith becomes sight and we are welcomed into our Lord’s visible Presence. So, whatever it costs; seek his will, and then just mind God!

Yours, "in Christ,"

Brother Jim

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Note: You can learn more about this ministry at www.InChristFellowship.org. We encourage you to contact us at Support@InChristFellowship.org if you have questions or need help in applying these truths in your own life. We do not maintain a "membership roll," nor do we solicit monetary contributions; yet, we also encourage you to contact us if you feel led of the Lord, to participate in our efforts in some way.

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