

Response to 'Deeply Saddened'

Bernie Gillespie

November 14, 2005

Dear [Anonymous],

I appreciate your concern about my spiritual welfare. That is one of the main reasons for my web site. I am concerned about the faith and spiritual welfare of folks who need to understand the biblical meaning and power of the Gospel. I understand when you say you are sad over my testimony. Please let me humbly say that you need not be sad for me. I am resting in Jesus and trusting him completely with all my soul. I know it is disturbing to read about someone who used to believe what you presently believe. However, rest assured that I am not in spiritual trouble. Christ is all and all to me and I look to him alone.

Many of the comments you made I have address with articles on my web site. Many people just read part of my testimony, written 10 years ago, and they write me to give me a piece of their mind, without looking further into the answers that I have already written and made available. I ask that you understand my faith in the whole journey, and not from reading one part of it. Also, I say this kindly, and not to argue, but it is patronizing and impolite as a Christian to tell them "First of all, you are wrong and deep down you know it. You do not fully believe what you are teaching now, there is no way you possibly can when you know truth." No, I don't know I am wrong deep down. Yes, I do fully believe what I am teaching. You judge my motives without doing the hard work of reading my articles and pointing out with Scriptural study why I am wrong. I guess that means I am wrong because you say so. That's a frail reason for saying I am wrong. [We could argue 'round and 'round in an immature way saying, "You're wrong," "no, you're wrong." But the test is whether we speak what Scripture teaches. I am confident that the Bible teaches that I am right with God by trusting in the life, death and resurrection of my Lord Jesus Christ for my salvation. I believe that is what Scripture teaches. If I am wrong, then show from Scripture where that is wrong]

Besides, the whole issue is not whether I am right or wrong. It is whether Jesus is sufficient. You say that you believe we are saved by grace and faith but "that is not all". My friend, that is all. It is by grace alone because only God in Christ could take away our sins on the Cross. It is by faith alone because Christ "finished" it and all that is left for me is to trust in what he has done. Scripture teaches: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Paul states in Romans 4:2-5 "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." We are righteous through faith in Christ. It is by faith because Christ has done it all. That is what the Bible means by grace. And because salvation is by grace the only part we play is to receive it. As Paul clearly states in Romans 4:16 "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace."

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I really understand where you are coming from, though, because I used to believe exactly as you. It was not because I got smarter, or someone argued me out of my position. It was when God totally stunned me with the truth of the real nature of salvation in the Bible, despite my own "assumptions" and convictions. He opened my heart to how wrong I was about the real nature of the Gospel. He made me understand what made the good news such good news. I cannot take the slightest credit. I was locked into my view. Only God could have changed my heart. What was that change? It was coming to a greater understanding of what Jesus did for me on the Cross. Before, I only saw the remission of sins in the work of the Cross. I failed to see the imputation of Christ's righteousness by that same work of the Cross. That was a major transformation of my understanding. Too many Christians have no clue about the imputed righteousness of Christ to those who believe (Romans 4; Philippians 3). Before God showed me the Gospel, I also believed that Jesus died to "make salvation possible." I thought that Christ did all He could to make it possible for us to be saved, but then, we had to do our part through obedience to receive that salvation. I taught that Jesus was the sacrifice, but we had to obey specific things before that sacrifice would take effect.

So I preached those wrong beliefs with deep conviction, even though Christ said on the Cross: "It is finished." I told people they still had to obey Acts 2:38 before it was really finished. I didn't truly understand what Acts 2:38 truly means. I thought I did. I shouted what I understood from the pulpit. But, I found that I was only repeating what other men had put in my mind. I'm afraid this is so for many who in the UPCI. They are following what a few men came up with in 1913. The real truth of Acts 2:38 is about Christ and him alone. It's about how all are forgiven who turn away from the sin of trusting in their own selves or religion to save them and turning to Jesus in faith and trust in him as Savior and Lord (which is true repentance). Baptism then, is a seal or guarantee – an assurance – of the believers' forgiveness. Finally, according to the promise of God, we are assured of the abiding presence of the Spirit. (The point of the Holy Spirit is not what we must do to "get it," but the fact that God in grace gives him to indwell in us. I believe the UPCI tragically misses the whole point on this.)

All those united to Christ by faith are granted these things from God. While I was in the UPCI I had turned the real grace God, as taught in Acts 2:38, into a set of qualifications for marking *who is in* and *who is out*. That is the anti-gospel - preaching focused on *who is not saved*. The biblical Gospel is a message of hope that we are saved when we trust in Christ alone. Peter found out he was wrong about qualifying people in Acts chapters ten and fifteen. When God sent him to the Gentiles He was showing him the greatness of His grace. Peter learned he was wrong about the Gospel as he explained to the council:

"Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." (Acts 15:7-11)

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While in the UPCI I taught: "If you trust in Jesus, that gets you to the door, but now unless you are correctly water baptized, and speak with tongues, you cannot truly obtain salvation." That is a major error and contrary to all the teaching throughout Scripture concerning God's character, and the nature of salvation by Christ alone. Peter says that God purified their hearts by faith, but the UPCI says that God purifies their heart by obeying three steps, continuing to stay spiritual (what is more spiritual than trusting in Jesus?), continuing to obey, by following the "holiness" standard (too much of which is not based on a single passage of Scripture), and then maybe if they are ready and prayed up at the Rapture they might go. (This is the UPCI message of hope. If I do all the UPCI teaches, I hope I make it).

That is not good news. That is another ladder to heaven like all other religions. [We used to sing, "We are climbing Jacob's ladder, ladder." This is an insight to how we changed the message of Scripture and the meaning of salvation. Jacob never climbed the ladder in Genesis 28. The angels came down to him. Jesus did not bring us a ladder to heaven. He said, "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the son of Man." (John 3:13) Later, Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:51 NIV) Jesus came down the ladder to save us. He came down from heaven to bear the wrath of our sins and conquer death to take us up to Heaven. That's good news. We are not able to climb up Jacob's ladder; and we don't need to since Jesus has come down to us. Paul makes it clear:

"But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Romans 10:6-10 NIV)

God opened my heart to understand that my salvation was finished by Christ, 2000 years ago at Calvary, and not by anything that I can or should do now. This is major problem for people in the UPCI. They don't understand the relationship between grace and works. Paul states: "For by grace are ye saved through faith ... For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works ..." (Eph. 2:8, 10). We are not saved by works. We are saved by grace through faith unto good works. Good works are the fruit of salvation not the requirement.

Even my faith today is simply trusting that what God did for me in Christ is sufficient and true. I trust in Jesus who is my Lord and Savior. My faith is a gift from God (Eph. 1:8), and is not something by which I merit what Jesus did. This truth was a wrecking ball to my theology, because like most Oneness Pentecostals, I really believed and preached more of a works-righteousness than I was willing to admit. Whenever one says that we must add something, either that we do, or that someone must do for us, to the

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work of the Cross of Christ, then one is adding human effort to Jesus' perfect sacrifice. One may not believe that is what they are doing. But it is so nonetheless.

How do we test it? We test it by answering this question: Does a person have to do anything to contribute to their salvation, or do they simply trust in what Jesus has done? The answer to that question will reveal the truth. Once I really understood the biblical truth of the Gospel, I was amazed that I had actually thought that baptism was an act of salvation. Why, because baptism is not important? Absolutely not! Baptism is necessary for every believer that has ever trusted in Jesus. Jesus commanded it and we must obey Christ as a true disciple. However, it is necessary to show our faith in Christ, and not to obtain our salvation. Imagine how anyone could add anything, even baptism, to make Jesus' work more perfect. But Hebrews states: "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Hebrews 10:14) To say that we are saved only after baptism is to say that Jesus did not finish it at Calvary, and that we must finish it because we are not perfected by the one offering of Jesus. How can we ever finish what we did not start? How can we improve on what is already perfect?

My friend, you are concerned about me and I truly appreciate that. I am also concerned about you as Paul was about the Corinthians:

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him." (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

The most religious, moral and pious group of people can fall into the error of preaching another Gospel than Jesus and the Apostles gave us. We can receive "another gospel" as though it is the true Gospel, when in fact it has fallen away from the "simplicity that is in Christ."

You have asked me some questions. I close with some questions I would like you to think about. These are not to stir up more contention. Nor do you have to answer these questions to me. I ask them to encourage you to think about your beliefs in ways in which you are not normally challenged. My hope is that you ask these questions of your self, in your own heart and mind: How do you know you are saved? Is it by what you have done, or what Christ has done? Is grace totally a free gift or just partly free with a conditional part that you have to work out as a Christian? Are you saved by grace, or grace (what Christ has done) plus works (what you must do)?

What obedience do you think contributes to your salvation? Are you right with God by the steps you take or the steps, which Christ took on the Cross? Is it by faith, trusting totally in Christ and not in yourself, or is it partly trusting Christ, while trusting your efforts to do the rest for which Christ is not enough? What is your righteousness before God? Is it the righteousness you have produced by the Holy Spirit? Or is it by the righteousness produced only by Christ's obedience in his life and death on the Cross? Finally, what is your assurance for Heaven? Is it that you have followed the right doctrine,

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are part of the correct movement, or obeyed the correct doctrines? Or is it that Jesus is your only way to the Father and you have nothing but Jesus to offer before Him? In other words, is Christ sufficient for you, and is He your all and all? How one answers these questions really shows the basis of one's salvation.

Thank you for writing and for taking the time to read my response.

Respectfully,
Bernie Gillespie