

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Whose Sin?

Louis Garbi

“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

There are victims in this world. There are people who have been subjugated and abused by others more powerful than themselves: the bullies and the bullied, the wealthy oppressing the poor, men of power trapping the powerless, adults abusing children, adults abusing adults. However, all are commanded to repent, not just the mean-spirited and the powerful. Repentance is a high calling, and all are responsible.

Here are attributes we can engage:

1. We can know God’s standard for behavior.
2. We can oversee our own behavior.
3. We can recognize our sins according to God’s standard.
4. We can recognize the hope of redemption.
5. We can turn away from sins.
6. We can turn back to our Creator.

These point to qualities even a hardened soul can fulfill.

There is competition against repentance. We may find ourselves surrounded by barriers of complexity. Fences are erected from mankind’s tendency for self-justification. It’s like a reverse image of when Satan challenged God concerning Job’s righteousness.

1. “It is because of my parents.”
2. “It is because of my body chemistry.”
3. “It is because of what other people have done to me.”
4. “I didn’t ask to be born.”

Each of these reasons may have an element of truth. There are circumstances which cannot be controlled. Certainly, many souls need understanding more than reproach. However, there comes a point in life where each of us, individually, must accept responsibility for our sins. We cannot excuse ourselves because we may be victims of circumstance. Take this excerpt for an example: *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites. . .” (1 Corinthians 6:9).* Consider homosexuality. Among other

things, it can refer to a boy who has been sexually abused and warped into effeminacy by adults. The evil practice of pederasty has been in the world for a long time. Consider the life of such a victim as he grows into physical maturity. No doubt, he could have confusion, anger, cynicism, and unnatural desire. This is a world-wide problem and it is old. However, the scripture gives us hope. *“And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. . .” (1 Corinthians 6:11).* If being a victim has brought us to a point where we actively engage in sinful behavior, we must repent. Repentance is indicated by the statement, *“such were some of you.”* Without repentance, we can never get away from our sins no matter how victimized we have been. Certainly, the perpetrator of abuse must repent. But victimization is not a reason for justification. We will never be happy blaming someone else for our own behavior.

The power of God makes repentance’s transformative work complete: *“you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”* Washed, sanctified, justified – these words point to being raised in honor, having been forgiven and transformed through Jesus and the Spirit of God.

- *“In the name of the Lord Jesus. . .”* points to His authority over all things. The apostle Paul prayed, *“that you may know . . . what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:18-20).* The power which the Father worked in Jesus can bring unimaginable changes to our lives.
- *“By the Spirit of our God”* states the power given to God’s children. *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Romans 8:15).* By the Spirit, we have the power to develop in ourselves our Father’s love. *“Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:24).* The knowledge of God abiding in us comes because the Spirit can help produce demonstrable change. It is a change from wrong to right. It is a change which causes thanksgiving to flow from our hearts.

Repentance’s fulfillment can only be accessed through faith. Do we believe in the power of God? This is a vital question. It is a matter of life or death. The snippets we have considered

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from Romans, First John, and Ephesians show the reality. Repentance can bring about true change. The scriptures show the potential of who we can be. They give us confidence in our Creator, who brings potential to fulfillment. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we have a wonderful enumeration of men and women who did amazing things through faith. They lived before the illumination of Christ Jesus, not knowing the advantages of salvation. The chapter concludes, "God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Hebrews 11:40).

Are we victims, or are we oppressors? Without repentance we will all die in sin. It is beautiful to repent, to obey commandment of God. By doing this, we engage the best part of who we are to become more than what we are. God provides the strength for our fulfillment from here to eternity.

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Relationships

Kevin Crittenden

Dear Kevin,

I am hoping you can help me with a difficult issue in my relationship with God. You see, I've been a good Christian for almost 12 years and, while things were good at first, lately I'm sensing a separation in our relationship that has been ongoing for some time. It's reached the point that, and I'm ashamed to admit this, I'm sometimes losing sight of the Cross.

I continue to attend church services regularly and will gladly do whatever is asked of me, yet my heart is not in it like it once was. And I miss that. Can you help me?

Sincerely,

Losing My Way

Dear Losing My Way,

Certainly, relationship issues can be thorny at times, whether with our spouse, our kids and even with God. Of course, there is a big difference with our relationship with God, because the problem is never with Him. But, as fallible, fallen humans, we are less than ideal partners.

People who have reached the third stage of life (older than 65), who are the experts in living life, have much wisdom to impart about successful marriages. We can apply that wisdom to our relationship with the Lord.

Commit yourself to the relationship

When I married, it was "until death do us part," certainly

NOT "as long as love shall last," or "as long as he/she makes me happy." Similarly, when you enter a relationship with God, your Baptism is a sign of your commitment to honoring a life-long covenant with the Lord. And just as the marriage ceremony contains the admonition to "love, honor and obey", we are also to love, honor and obey our Lord. He is not a silent partner but rather shares with us what we need to do:

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:37-38).

You're not going to change Him.

Some people marry thinking that they can "grow" their spouses into somebody more pleasing. This mindset doesn't work in marriage and it certainly doesn't work with God. If you think that by acting in a particularly "good" manner (attending church regularly, etc.) that this will "make" God love and bless you even more, then perhaps you have forgotten Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God..." (Ephesians 2:8). We are saved by His incomparable grace, not by what we do or don't do.

Talk to each other

I can't stress enough how important it is for a married couple to TALK to each other. About EVERYTHING. There should be NO topic that is out of bounds for discussion. Bring it ALL to the table and SHARE with your spouse. If a subject cannot be talked about without one of you becoming upset and leaving, then try a change of venue.

Similarly, it's no good talking with God and, with your many words, think that you will somehow deflect His attention away from that sin of which you are ashamed. Adopting the attitude, "Oh, it's too shameful for me to talk about, even with God," really demeans God, does it not? Do you think that He has stopped loving you because of your faulty nature? Do you think that He does not know the deep things about you? Remember what the Psalmist says, "Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him; for God is our refuge" (Psalm 62:8).

Don't keep score

Marriage is not a 50-50 proposition. Marriage is a 100-100 proposition. You both go into it giving 100% of yourselves. There is no place for keeping lists of "who did what." Such lists can only lead to unhappiness, resentment and nagging.

Do you think that God is holding back in His relationship with you? Have you forgotten the great sacrifice that He made on your behalf? Do you really want to keep score? "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

We were bought at a great price. Why? Because God does not hold back on His love for us, waiting for us to “even up the score.” *“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).* God continually pours His attention into His relationship with us. He cares for us deeply. *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matthew 10:29-30).*

Look at the imagery in Hosea – does it not suggest a loving relationship with us? And do you see how easily we lose sight of His love? But does He then withhold His love? No. He is in this relationship 100%. Are we?

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them” (Hosea 11:1-4).

So, my advice to you, “Dear Losing,” is to open your heart in all fullness to the Lord. Tell Him all about your feelings of separation and the sadness that such separation is causing you. Express to Him fully the sins that you carry in your heart, repent of those sins and accept His forgiveness and His steadfast love.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Kevin's article is an imagined conversation for the sake of edification. Thanks, Kevin, for stirring up our minds by reminding us about our relationship with God!

Shortcuts

Glen Owens

In almost every endeavor of mankind, there is an attempt to save time, effort and money by taking shortcuts. Even in education, there have been shortcuts made in math and other subjects to the advantage of the students. Not all shortcuts are as advertised, particularly in travel. The shortcut may be shorter, but it may take longer to reach the destination. Therefore, we must be alert to the fact that shortcuts may not be shortcuts.

The path to heaven has been charted by God through what is written in the bible. Man has tried to take shortcuts by

eliminating various steps in the plan that God has prescribed. A note in some instructions to ministers said that they were to “preach the gospel” as written in **Mark 16:15**. That was a true statement, but it was a shortcut. The verse says that they are to preach the gospel but the rest of the command is in **verse 16**, *“He that believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

This shortcut that omits baptism is very popular among many churches because it is very convenient, and they point out various scriptures that speak about faith and grace saving one’s soul. One common question is, “have you been born again?” If one answers no, then the usual method of a new birth is expressing a belief in Christ and accepting Him as your Savior.

Ignored in the above example is the teaching of Jesus when he explained the new birth to Nicodemus in **John 3:5**, *“I say to you that unless one is born of the water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* The ‘kingdom’ in other places in the New Testament is said to be the church. Hence, one must be baptized in water by the authority of God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit.

A common practice in some religious groups is called “praying through.” This means that one can gain salvation through prayer. When we read the account of Paul’s conversion, he prayed for three days but when Ananias went to Paul, he said, *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).* A shortcut many take is that they omit the first part of the verse about baptism washing away sins and go to *“calling on the name of the Lord.”*

The “sinner’s prayer” in various forms is taught by many churches. In this prayer, the one seeking salvation admits that he or she is a sinner and recites that he or she believes in Jesus and accepts Him as his or her Savior. The one teaching the person will normally tell him or her that based upon that statement he or she is saved. This is a very dangerous shortcut because it omits the new birth process that Jesus taught to Nicodemus and Paul went through.

There are various religions in the world that completely bypass Jesus in the salvation process. In **Acts 4:12**, Peter told the rulers of the Jews that there is no other name than Jesus whereby one may be saved. This is a statement that excludes salvation in any other religion than one that teaches salvation through Jesus.

Is it possible that when Jesus taught that He was the door to the sheepfold that there were those who would enter in by *“climbing up another way is a thief and a robber”* He is talking about those religions who do not accept Jesus as the Savior (**John 10:1**)? **Matthew 10:33**, *“But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”* These are the words of Jesus that were recorded by Matthew under the direction or inspiration of the Holy Spirit.



Please check your expiration date!

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As a final word on shortcuts, conversions in the book of Acts include acceptance of Jesus as Savior and baptism by immersion. Any shortcut that eliminates this is very dangerous.

~ 6154 Linda Ln., Indianapolis, IN 26241

Blessed Are the Dead

Kathryn Nickell, 94, of Blue Springs, MO passed away May 28. Kathryn was preceded in death by her husband, **J.C. Nickell**, who served the church as an elder of the church at **25th and Oakley, Kansas City, MO**. Following the closing of 25th and Oakley, Kathryn met with the church in **Blue Springs, MO**.

Milford Morris, 84, of Lee's Summit, MO, went to be with his Lord on June 4. Milford served for many years as an elder of the church which meets on **Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO**. Milford is survived by his wife Jean and many children and grandchildren.

Donna Walker, 71, of Raytown, MO, went to sleep in Jesus on June 5. Donna is survived by her husband **Paul** who serves as an elder of the church on **Gregory Boulevard, Raytown, MO**. She will be missed by her family, friends, and many loving brethren.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."
~ **Revelation 14:13**

Special Meetings

The brethren who meet at **Old Lamine (rural Blackwater, MO)** invite you to their annual Family VBS to be held on July 21. This year's theme is "Stand Strong or Stand Wrong." Classes and activities will be offered for both kids and adults.

The church in **Martinsville, IN** plans a **Ladies' Day** meeting led by **Sally Garbi** on September 22. On September 23, **Louis Garbi** will offer morning and afternoon lessons.

2018 Meetings

July 2-6.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 15-20.....Kirksville, MO VBS
July 21.....Old Lamine VBS (rural Blackwater, MO)
July 21-27.....Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO
August 26.....White Oak (rural Ethel, MO)
September 1-2.....Pleasant Hill, IA
September 22-23.....Martinsville, IN

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

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