

Nazarenes and the Church of Jesus Christ

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Table of Contents

Nazarenes, Consider Your Calling	5
I. THERE IS BUT ONE CHURCH	6
II. THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE AS A DENOMINATION	7
Nazarenes are Bible Christians	13
I. NAZARENES BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD	13
II. HOW DO NAZARENES (OR ANY CHRISTIANS) HEAR THE WORD OF GOD? ...	17
III. WHAT DOES IT MEAN: 'NAZARENES ARE BIBLE CHRISTIANS?'	17
The Freedom from Sin	21
I. SIN, SALVATION, AND THE SAVIOR	21
II. SIN AND SALVATION ARE PERSONAL IN NATURE	24

Nazarenes, Consider Your Calling

Nazarenes and the Church of Jesus Christ - Part 1 of 3

1. **Nazarenes, Consider Your Calling**
2. **Nazarenes are Bible Christians**
3. **The Freedom from Sin**

January 10, 1992

I Corinthians 1:26 - 31

Introduction:

-A Personal Word-

I think it is important to share some thoughts on what it means to be a Nazarene. If you know me at all, you know that I love the Church of the Nazarene. I do not consider being a Christian and being a member of the Church of the Nazarene synonymous. Being truly Christian is the most important thing in the world to me. I trust that I am a Christian far and away before I am a Nazarene.

Still, being a Nazarene is vitally important to me, for it defines what I believe and how I act in a great many critical areas of life.

Christians are not to be isolated, laws unto themselves. Christians are to be part of Christ's church; they are born into it. Christians need to be part of some Christian fellowship, some visible part or expression of Christ's church.

If I were not a Nazarene I would hope that I would act in some responsible manner, and not claim to be a Christian while being a total law unto myself, not accountable to anyone or anybody.

There may be Christians still living today who say, "We do not believe in theology or interpretations of the Bible. We just believe the Bible!" But these kinds of people, if they still do exist, are very quick to interpret the Bible for other people who are not quite as intelligent as they are!

Now, to begin: What about the "denomination" called the International Church of the Nazarene? Where did it come from and why? What about denominations, period?

I. THERE IS BUT ONE CHURCH

[ONE, HOLY, APOSTOLIC. CATHOLIC]

ALL Christians, whatever they call themselves, ARE CALLED TO BE "SAINTS" (1:2)
Our basic calling is to be "saints" (1:2) and not first to be Nazarenes or any other hyphenated name. We are not even called first to build the church but to proclaim Christ, and then He has promised to build His own church!

SO WHY ARE THERE DIFFERENT 'CHURCHES IN THE CHURCH'? Why have denominations at all?

We who have been reared in a denomination have a hard time understanding any other form the church of Jesus might take. Those from other traditions cannot grasp the purpose or even the legitimacy of denominations. Why are there "denominations" anyway?

There are ETHNIC reasons. There are DOCTRINAL reasons. There are CULTURAL reasons. There are even PERSONAL reasons for denominations.

There are WORSHIP preferences: Different denominations worship differently when they gather in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some traditions emphasize RATIONAL DOCTRINE; some traditions emphasize EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE; and still others need MYSTICAL BEAUTY AND RITUAL at the heart of their Christian worship.

Some denominations think they are the only true church. Others "KNOW" they are! There are still other "denominations" that deny that they are denominations!

But even large church groups that do not call themselves by the name 'denomination' find that de facto they must form some kind of alliance to promote joint ventures in mission: to standardize the ordination of their clergy, whatever they may call them; and to find some means of disciplining or keeping pure those sacred doctrines they hold as dear.

THERE ARE GOOD REASONS FOR FORMING ALLIANCE BETWEEN CHURCHES

Denominations can multiply effort; they can serve to make the church more effective. An outstanding example is the mission endeavor in our denomination. Ours is not the only way to go about evangelization of the world. But it is the best way we have found. It has huge pluses, and perhaps some minuses.

One huge plus is that just about 85% of mission money makes it right through to the field! The other 15% is not at all wasted, however— it is in necessary networks of supervision, communication, and the like. Many so-called philanthropic groups do not come near getting that high a percentage of money to the front lines.

The minuses?: Perhaps some individuality is missed; perhaps in the rubric of bureaucracy some injustices are done. But the comparison makes our mission efforts seem wise. More loosely structured mission boards demand more extensive deputation work and much more energy is spent simply raising the support.

Denominations can clarify and develop certain approaches and understandings of scripture that keep the peculiar emphasis or emphases of that denomination strong. [In all honesty just about all denominations have their sacred cows; or arguments that begin with the conclusion and work backward to the scriptural proof texts.]

OUR REASON FOR EXISTENCE HAS BEEN A QUEST FOR WHAT IN THE REST OF THE CHURCH WORLD IS CALLED 'THE DEEPER LIFE' AND IN OUR OWN TERMINOLOGY IS CALLED "CHRISTIAN HOLINESS."

Nazarene faith is "orthodox," in that it does not depart from ancient, creedal statements about the faith. But Nazarene faith focuses on "holiness." By "holiness" we mean a personal quest for genuine piety, a corporate accountability for carrying out the commandments of Jesus, particularly the Great Commission.

But just now I am talking about how we came about as a denomination:

II. THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE AS A DENOMINATION

JUST WHO ARE THESE NAZARENES? They have a unique and God-ordained place in the Christian community. Nazarenes are NOT (or certainly should not be) merely a

Nazarenes, Consider Your Calling

pale copy of other groups in their doctrines or practices.

In the Providence of God we came into being for a reason. We believe we were called of God to meet a need. We exist to help people into a holy walk with God!

Sometimes in order to be better understood we say: "We are just like Old Fashioned Methodists" Or "We worship a lot like the Baptists" or we use other good groups for comparisons or contrasts. This may or may not be helpful.

Still, it certainly helps if we know just what we DO believe and don't need to apologize at all for it!

[A very brief history lesson:]

Quite a number of groups or denominations have come about as the result of "reform" or reaction within an established church or denomination. Sometimes denominations have been shaped ethnic or cultural responses to orthodox truth. [United Brethren, for example, were mainly German speaking followers of Wesley in the Pennsylvania farmlands.]

Some denominations have reflected a personality of a charismatic leader. Calvin, Luther, Wesley— But this has been disastrous in some cases, especially when the leader has encouraged it. [Mary Baker Eddy, Russellism (Jehovah's Witnesses; hundreds of sects from James Jones back...]

Our denomination does not primarily reflect any of these origins, although some elements of all may have been present in parts of our formation as a church.

Toward the end of the 1800's there was a large, informal, but pronounced spiritual awakening throughout Protestant America.

I would refer you to Dr. Timothy Smith's book "REVIVALISM AND SOCIAL REFORM" for a scholarly overview. [This was coincidental with the Camp Meeting phenomenon in rural America, the Keswick awakening in Britain as well as the "deeper life quests" in many areas.]

We Nazarenes look to a man called PHINEAS F. BRESEE as our "founder." But actually Dr. Bresee was more of a convener. He found thousands of people who were riding the crest of the revival that was moving through the established denominations and in many places about the turn of the last century.

[My own parents both were products of the tail end of that revival movement; they were saved in the Methodist church and when they pursued seriously the "deeper life" of holiness they found mixed receptions. They were warmly received at Taylor University, which was at that time a "holiness Methodist" school. But they were much more comfortable with the people called Nazarenes, and soon after graduation they joined a great church in Monongehela, Pennsylvania in 1928. The pastor was John Andre, the father of the John Andre at Warren, Pennsylvania (in the 1950s).]

There were Holiness congregationalists in the east (Providence, Rhode Island) Groups in the south (Nashville)— and they merged several times, each time growing larger, and each time adding to the levels of compromise and understanding of what was and what was not "spiritually acceptable."

Some of the comprehension of the movement I knew as a boy [and it was a movement!] seems in retrospect almost sect-like. There was a tyranny of convictions at times. We were strong on personal discipline, and that extended to appearance and manners. It seems, looking back, that culture and refinement were next to godliness, especially in our colleges and schools.

It was good discipline and training for me, I believe— even though it was hard at times.

But underneath it all, BASIC TO EXISTENCE was a commitment to total consecration and Spirit-filled, Spirit-led living. WE TOOK AS OUR MISSION TELLING THE WORLD THAT THEY COULD BE FREE FROM THE TYRANNY OF SIN!

There was always a sense of obligation to the present generation. Dr. Bresee was often quoted: "We are debtors to give the gospel in the same measure as we have received it." (Or was that Dr. J.G. Morrison?)

Nazarenes, Consider Your Calling

There was also a genuine spirit of gentleness among those who were truly "sanctified," and a spirit of holy compromise on non-essentials, a compromise that has not always been evident in every area of the denomination.

Finally, Nazarene worship always seemed to me to be characterized by joy.

NAZARENES HAVE DOCTRINALLY FOLLOWED WESLEY, or at least they have intended so to do. Nearly to the last person, the ministers believe that they are in accord with the spirit of Wesley. Further more, in my view, the leadership of our denomination has (tacitly) agreed: Bresee was a Methodist, and so we have never disagreed with the M.E. doctrine of, say, a century ago. Our early Manuals were patterned after Methodist Disciplines. We have felt comfortable in following what has been a Methodistic tradition.

My personal position has been to try to "leap over" superficial and casual interpretations of Wesley, to read Wesley's Journal and his sermons and explanatory notes, and to try to catch the spirit and the heart of the teaching of this 18th century reformer.

NAZARENES SEEM TO BE ECLECTIC IN THEIR WORSHIP FORMS

WE REFLECT A (GOOD) (EVEN HOLY?) TENSION BETWEEN THE EXTREMES OF EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTISM TODAY: This reflects Wesley's statement to the effect: "In essentials, faithfulness; in non-essentials tolerance; in all things charity!"

CONCLUSION

These have been very sketchy, personal observations. I know that I have rambled, and I thank you for your patience. I think I have some important things to consider as we think together about what it means to be a Nazarene over the next few divisions of this theme. You may have to listen hard, and even hear some things I mean instead of what I simply say.

But in closing just now let me say JUST TWO things about being a Nazarene:

1. If I am going to be a Nazarene I must know for myself what it means to be sanctified wholly.

Our terminology may seem confusing to ears who have been taught other viewpoints; our doctrines may even be in question to other sincere Christians.

BUT THERE IS A HARD, TRUE, CLEAR KERNEL OF TRUTH IN THAT EXPERIENCE WE CALL OUR "CARDINAL DOCTRINE." THERE IS REALITY IN COMING TO THE PLACE WHERE, AS A BELIEVER, I MAKE A COMPLETE SACRIFICE, AND COME TO THE END OF MY SELF-RULE, AND SELF-WILL, AND BECOME A CANDIDATE FOR THE FULLNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

I may not understand the psychology of what it means to be sanctified, but I know that it makes the difference between sticking and falling away! I know it makes the difference between going back when the going gets tough or hanging in there and trusting that God is GOD and that God is GOOD!

IF I AM GOING TO BE A NAZARENE I WANT TO KNOW THAT I AM SANCTIFIED WHOLLY!

Not glorified like the saints in heaven. Not perfect so that I cannot or do not sometimes come short of God's glory. But sanctified until every part of my being, body, mind and spirit belong to Jesus Christ, with no provision ever to take them back. Sanctified so that the Holy Spirit has access to all there is of me!

2. And, too, if I am going to be a Nazarene then I will be loyal to my denomination, and loyal to my local church!

I may not agree with everything or understand everything. But the "corporate conscience" of my church will carry great weight in my personal decisions. And any quarrels I may have with my church will be lovers' quarrels. I will be stubborn toward what I see as compromise in scriptural application, and speak my mind when I think my church is wrong, but I will be exceedingly pliable toward God, and ask Him to bless and love my church through me!

Join me in prayer for our church.

PRAYER

1. Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, even though often the world in which we live is dark. Grant us grace to put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility. Grant us grace that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, or in that hour when we shall be called to meet Him, we may be found faithful amid the chaos, rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
2. May the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you and scatter the darkness from before your path: and the blessing of God Almighty— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

Nazarenes are Bible Christians

Nazarenes and the Church of Jesus Christ - Part 2 of 3

1. [Nazarenes, Consider Your Calling](#)
2. **Nazarenes are Bible Christians**
3. [The Freedom from Sin](#)

January 17, 1992

Two texts:

John 5:39 Search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me.

Hebrews 4:12 - 13 For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing - asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things [are] naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

INTRODUCTION

It probably goes without serious objection that Nazarenes believe they are Bible Christians. I want to challenge that belief in a friendly way by asking three questions:

1. Is the Bible as we have it "the Word of God?"
2. How do we hear God's Word?
3. How do we (Nazarenes) live under the authority of the Word of God?

I. NAZARENES BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

- A. Nazarenes believe in the Bible. But even such a simple statement as saying that the Bible is God's Word can be understood and explained in many different ways. Where does the International Church of the Nazarene officially stand regarding "the Bible?"

1. An excellent place to begin would be with the Manual statement, which good Nazarenes should know and respect. The Manual states:

We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that what is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith.

2. The Manual statement is really quite remarkable in what it does not say! It stops short of saying exactly how, or by what method the Bible was written, how it is inspired. It gives room for the mystery which, really, no one can fully explain except by faith.

A key word is the word "plenary," used to describe the inspiration of the Bible. By plenary the article of faith declares that the Bible, in all its parts, is totally inspired, that it is a miracle of revelation. This inspiration is so clear and powerful that "if it is not in the Bible it is not to be made binding on us as an article of faith."

The statement does not make Nazarenes go beyond the clear meaning of those words.

- B. Nazarene roots are "synergistic" roots. We believe that the Bible is a Divine-human book. We believe that by and in and through God's grace the human can and must cooperate with the divine in claiming our redemption. These Nazarene roots reflect a number of very interesting sources.

1. There is the catholicism of the Church of England as reflected in John Wesley. Wesley thought of himself as a Reformed theologian; and while he would certainly deny that in any wise he was earning his salvation there was enough of the Holy Club and discipline in him that he would not abide for a moment any Christian who did not put his/her life where the testimony was! "Bring forth fruit meet for repentance!" was implicit in his very life and living.
2. Nazarenes also embrace of some aspects of Arminianism, about which the rank and file pastor knows precious little. But Arminianism represents a

resistance to extreme Calvinism, particularly in TWO major points. What this says to the general practitioner pastor like myself is that while all grace is of God, yet that grace enables the human personality to participate in its own salvation to the extent that it can choose to resist God's grace or to accept it.

THERE IS ALWAYS MYSTERY ALONG THE LINE WHERE GOD REACHES OUT TO CONVERSE WITH HUMANKIND.

3. The dilemma is most apparent in the way we understand that people are saved. But it is also expressed in the way that we perceive the Bible.
 - a. Some would emphasize God's Sovereignty to the extent that man has had nothing to do with the holy scriptures except hold the pen while God gave the exact words.
 - b. An opposite, humanistic, view says that the Bible is inspired exactly like all other great works of literature, no more and no less. It ranks at the top of human literature, perhaps, at least in many passages. But it is the product, totally, of human effort, and expresses human thought, perhaps divinely inspired, but still limited to human expression, no more.
 - c. But there is at least one other way to view inspiration: others, and we include ourselves here, believe that God has expressed Himself in a way that excludes error in all matters necessary to our salvation, but that this Word, divine Word, has come poured through vessels that are in and of themselves human and imperfect.
- C. How did we get the Bible in this form? Can we say with confidence "This is God's Word!"? I can and I do! But this is a faith statement! The mysteries of God are NOT the magic of God.
 1. The "canon" of the Bible (by which we mean the 66 books of our Protestant Bible) did not come into existence apart from human agency. The Bible did not fall down from heaven complete as we have it now, even though one way or another all true Christians have come to believe that it is God's divine revelation.

2. (A wee bit of "over-simplified history:") It took a long period of time for these various "theories" to develop. The original apostles were much more speakers, preachers, proclaimers than they were writers. But as it became apparent that they would not always be around their messages were recorded in written form.

As early as 150 A.D. Justin Martyr wrote that the gospels of the (present) canon were being read in churches assembled on Sunday.

3. There were also many other writings with claims to be scriptural or apostolic. Gospels were written by Clement of Rome, and under the name of Barnabus, as well as the Shepherd of Hermas.

The letters of Peter and Paul and John and the author of Hebrews and the canonical and non-canonical gospels were "sifted" and tried across the years.

In 325 A.D. Eusebius wrote that "seven writings in the New Testament were not universally received. They were called the "Antilegomena," and consisted of James, Jude, 2 John, 3 John, 2 Peter, Hebrews, and the Apocalypse. (Not the Apocrypha, now.)

It was not until nearly 400 A.D. in the Council of Carthage, in 397, the church officially stated that the 66 books we now hold as sacred were truly scripture.

4. This "human involvement" need not shake your faith that God has given us this Bible one little bit! WE MUST REFUSE TO BE OBSCURANTISTS. When facts are presented they must be assessed and dealt with. But NO FACTS HAVE EVER SUCCESSFULLY CONTRADICTED THE LIVING TRUTH OF THE BIBLE!

D. For myself, I simply believe that the Holy Spirit has been involved in every aspect of the written Word. He has been active in its original utterance, but He also makes it available at the place where it is needed and welcomed. Which brings us to the second question:

II. HOW DO NAZARENES (OR ANY CHRISTIANS) HEAR THE WORD OF GOD?

A. WE HEAR WHEN WE LISTEN! God is speaking in His Word, but too often we are not really listening!

1. Eugene Peterson makes distinction between READING the Bible and HEARING the Word. He is not just speaking about the difference between visual and auditory. The reader has control of what, where, how he shall give attention. Or she is free to just let her mind wander. The listener is engaged in some kind of immediate relationship. A "message" is coming through, personally; like the difference of a pocket radio or a portable telephone.
2. The living WORD OF GOD IS NEVER 'CONTROLLED'! It is not simply abstract truth or "information." It demands life-involvement. That is why Bible preaching is important! To some extent preaching cannot be controlled, and can release the WORD; also systematic and regular reading gives access to the WORD.

[Peterson speaks of the link between "speaker" and "hearer" this way: SPEAKER - WRITER - READER - HEARER. The intermediate links of writing and reading are all too often made all-important. What the original compassion/passion/burden of the prophet or Psalmist or preacher may have spoken or written under inspiration must be received by the help of the Holy Spirit by LISTENING, by GIVING ATTENTION, by HEARING WITH THE EARS OF THE SOUL.]

B. IT SHOULD NEVER BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED, BUT NAZARENES OFTEN HEAR THE WORD OF GOD!!

III. WHAT DOES IT MEAN: 'NAZARENES ARE BIBLE CHRISTIANS?'

DO WE IN FACT LIVE 'UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD?'

A. HEARING IS NOT (QUITE) THE SAME AS BELIEVING IN THE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD!

1. One step beyond HEARING (or knowing that God has spoken) is the attitude of obedience. We must bring to our encounters with God and with his Word the

surrendered will.

2. Thus: TO TRULY BELIEVE IN THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES
DEMANDS A WILL SURRENDERED TO GOD ALMIGHTY!

B. Every spiritual awakening, personal and church-wide, has begun with renewed prayer.
And every spiritual awakening, church-wide or personal, has also been accompanied
with obedience to the Word of God!

1. Our church came into existence because we believe the BIBLE has spoken to
us and to the world about the reality of SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS!
2. If I am going to be a Nazarene I must READ the Bible, but more, I must listen
for God to speak, and I must gladly put myself under the authority of the Word
of God!

Conclusion:

In closing let me repeat a warning!

BEWARE THE BIBLE! It is a dangerous book to have around the house!

1. Beware having it around the house! Just to HAVE IT AROUND THE HOUSE can bring
COMPLACENCY! Stacks of Bibles won't make your house any holier ... but you might
THINK it is!
2. Beware reading the Bible! Just to READ THE BIBLE can nourish SPIRITUAL PRIDE!
We can be like the scriptural expert who went to the house of prayer and thanked God
that he was not like the poor publican praying off in the corner, "Lord, have mercy on me,
a sinner!"
3. Beware reading and listening and OBEYING the Bible! But TO HEAR AND TO OBEY
THE BIBLE IS MOST DANGEROUS OF ALL!

It can "ruin your life!" All your (selfish) ambitions and plans may just come tumbling
down all around your head! You just might hear Jesus say: "Come, leave YOUR way
and follow ME!"

And if you do you'll never be the same again!

[Calvinism, as I understand it, was founded on five principles

[TULIP]: Total depravity (nothing good in humanity) Unconditional grace
(Humankind can do NOTHING save themselves) Limited atonement (The "elect"
chosen by God) Irresistible Grace Perseverance of the saints (Eternal security)

Of course, what I call Arminianism disputes some of these, particularly the "U" and
the "I" and the "P." And our understanding of the "T" is somewhat different, as well.

[It is interesting that even then they could not agree just as to HOW they viewed
Divine inspiration. Back then many did believe that the scriptures had been verbally
inspired, and this sacrosanct faith was even extended to the Septuagint or Greek
translation of the Old Testament as well.]

[The various groups differed on the degree of inspiration of the books comprising the
Apocrypha, with all Protestants generally respecting them but giving them a less-
than-scriptural place. One main reason is that Jesus never quoted from or alluded to
any of the Apocryphal books.]

The Freedom from Sin

Nazarenes and the Church of Jesus Christ - Part 3 of 3

1. Nazarenes, Consider Your Calling
2. Nazarenes are Bible Christians
3. **The Freedom from Sin**

January 26, 1992

Text: Romans 3:23

What is there to say about sin? We're against it! Which sin are we talking about? "I hope it isn't the one sin I excuse in my life!"

I am not talking just now about this sin or that sin; I am speaking about sin. Sin is not popular. It is a God-related word; God is the Great Irrelevancy.

I. SIN, SALVATION, AND THE SAVIOR

- A. NEXT TO OUR CONCEPT OF GOD HIMSELF, PERHAPS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SIN IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF OUR PERSONAL THEOLOGY.

What we understand of the nature of sin has a tremendous effect on the way we seek to come to God. It helps determine how we come to confidence that we are saved, ready for heaven:

1. Two definitions that help some and yet don't say it all:
 - a. Wesley "Sin is a wilful transgression of a known law of God,
 - b. "Sins" (plural) are acts; and "sin" is an inner "bent" or "nature."
2. We might better try to think of how sin is a PERSON-al, or RELATIONAL matter.

Whatever else sin is, it is being WRONG with God. Whatever salvation is, it is being RIGHT with Him.

- B. Think with me through two or three "inner dramas" of people coming to seek salvation. See how the idea of what sin is goes to the heart of how we come to trust:

1. A commonly held "Nazarene" understanding of sin. Sin is being "bad," and sinning separates me from God. Salvation is being GOOD (once I've been to the altar to take care of being BAD).

And later I should come back to the altar to take care of the SIN (singular="bent to sin") so I won't get angry any more.

A. The "drama" goes like this:

I come to the altar. I confess my sins as I am told. I am given a clean slate, which assures me I will go to heaven if I die. I have a list of things I must and must not do. I must read and pray. I must not smoke or drink. I should go to church when I can, but then (Significant Other Person) is rather casual about it, so maybe that isn't all that important.

I start out with confidence. Then a couple of bad things can happen:

- a. I keep all the neat rules, like NOT smoking and NOT drinking and so forth, and so I "know" I am saved even though from year to year I never really come to know the Lord Jesus in any personal way, and I never help any fellow mortal move one inch closer to the kingdom of God; or,
 - b. I soon find out that my clean slate is all messed up. I start over several times. Finally I quit in disgust saying that I cannot honestly live a Christian life. I drop away and say there is nothing real in this fake religion.
 - c. Or— in spite of not having a perfect understanding of all these things I find a personal, growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and somehow the miracle continues to grow!
2. Let me have the audacity to change the scene. Now I am a hard-shell Baptist, or a child of strict Reformed-Calvinist roots.
My definition of sin is sort of all the above PLUS— sin is ANY COMING SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD! And by that I mean any place I should do

better and don't, or shouldn't do bad and do. It is ALL sin! All my life I hear the Bible preached as propositional truth. "God said it! I believe it! That settles it!" Here's how MY "salvation drama" goes:

I "come forward." With good solid counseling I "receive the Lord Jesus as Savior."

I understand that He is my Substitute, and that His righteousness is IMPUTED as my own. God now looks at me, and instead of my sins He sees the righteousness of His Son.

I am honor-bound to read and pray and prove the reality of my new birth by (1) Baptism; (2) Tithing; (3) Witnessing.

If I do these things

- a. I often come to live far above the raw simplistic application of the very real Truth of this system, and the discipline carries me into a genuine relationship. OR,
 - b. I drift into old ways, and from time to time I "re-dedicate my life" during times of emotional challenge. All the while I am more-or-less consoled by the fact that I have received "eternal Life" which by definition can never be forfeit, otherwise how is it "eternal?"
 - c. Or— in spite of not having a perfect understanding of all these things I find a personal, growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and somehow the miracle continues to grow!
3. Let me be even MORE audacious! Let me describe a person with some form of Catholic up-bringing. Sin to me is pretty much defined by the Church. There are mortal sins; there are venal sins. Jesus Christ is GOD and Savior, but the idea of salvation is mediated through both the Word and the Traditions of the Church. I need to (1) be baptized; (2) confirmed; (3) keep current by taking Mass regularly, which should involve regular confession as well.
- My "salvation drama" comes when somehow these truths I have been taught become personal to me. I am saved by being in fellowship with the Church, and obeying from the heart its teachings, and IT mediates and brings me to Jesus

Christ.

Or— in spite of not having a perfect understanding of all these things I find a personal, growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and somehow the miracle continues to grow!

C. IN ALL THESE DIFFERENT STORIES REAL SALVATION NEEDS A PRESENT SAVIOR

No human agency can fully present the truth so powerfully and true that "correct theology" will save. Somehow, by the Word being released and through the preaching I hear, in whatever church, I must grasp -the Idea that God knows ME-! He cares that I have sinned. He is angry with my sins, but I know He loves ME. I am enabled to enter into a personal relationship with Him. I ask Him for mercy and forgiveness. He grants it. I sense that I belong to Him.

[I do not know all the profound things that have taken place in me, perhaps, but I have been genuinely BORN AGAIN: Adopted, Regenerated, Justified!]

A relationship has been established. It is not easily broken! God doesn't give up on His children.

II. SIN AND SALVATION ARE PERSONAL IN NATURE

A. Unless there is a sinner there is no sin!

"Sin does not exist independently of the sinner." Sin is what a sinner does. The sin is the expression of the sinner. We sin because we are sinners. To quote premier Nazarene theologian, H. Ray Dunning: "We must not so much speak about sin as about man as sinner."

B. But what about "coming short of the glory of God?"

1. We've had Introduction to New Testament and we know that "sin" is usually translated from the Greek word ...'... ‡ ... (hamartia), which means "To miss the mark," and say "Sin is any time we come short of the glory of God."

But we have only a vague Idea of what coming short of God's glory might be. We think it is failing to live up to all the Ten Commandments, perhaps, or any deviation from God's perfect will.

2. The "glory of God" in human beings is the "image of God." The "glory of God" in you and me is the capacity we have for a good relationship with God Himself. It is the capacity to give and receive love from the Creator of the Universe.

Marred by the entrance of willful sin (original sin) the capacity remains to respond to grace.

C. Thus: SIN is that which RUINS OR PERVERTS RELATIONSHIPS

1. A "deadness" toward God. Living life as though a loving heavenly Father does not even exist.
2. A hostility and dishonesty toward fellow humans. The inability to be authentic, to love and receive love. Shutting down of compassion; living for self in advantage to others. Excluding all or part of the best social dimensions of life. The ultimate individualism.
3. A mistaken relationship toward Creation. Either tending to worship the creation as god; OR, to try to dominate it as though WE were God. A total misunderstanding of God-intended role as Vice-Regents
4. A miserable relationship with our own inner self. Helplessness! The dictator within! The usurper! Domination and Tyranny of self (Romans 7)

D. SO: SALVATION IS THAT WHICH DEALS WITH THE SEPARATION(S) OF SIN: Salvation must, then, do these four things: (and it does! it will!)

1. Freedom TO God. Daring to be open to Him! It gives us access to God on High; from far off places it brings us nigh to precious blessings that never die!
2. Freedom for the Other. The ability to relate to others in agape' love
3. Freedom from the Earth. Creation, nor the material benefits of living in this world, do not dominate.

To quote Dunning again:

"The clues to the boundaries of the mandate (Gen 1:28) is "the glory of God," to which unfallen man would be committed. It thus carries responsibility as well as privilege and implies ecological care-taking."

4. Freedom from Self-dominion

Dunning goes on (I am being VERY Nazarene in my conclusions!)

"The Lord becomes the dominant Partner in all relationships, not in an impersonal, arbitrary, or forced way, but in freedom God is made the Center. The uncoerced partner (you and I) can decide to dissolve the situation by attempting to assume an equal partnership, or by usurping the prerogatives of the Creator. In the Fall in Eden this prerogative was actualized. It has been repeated in kind in each of our lives, until we are set free to put the Lord God back at the center of our lives and assume the correct relationship with Him. -H. Ray Dunning

CONCLUSION:

What can we do about sin? What IS sin?

SIN IS WHATEVER KEEPS US FROM LOVING GOD!

SIN IS WHATEVER WE PUT AHEAD OF HIM!

The only way to really KNOW God is to LOVE Him! Love is how God reaches out to us! God so LOVED!

To love is to know— it seems so backwards!

But ultimately we don't come to God by knowing more, or by being better, or by saying more prayers than the next person.

And we don't maintain our relationship with God by having a superior theology than the Calvinists or Catholics.

To LOVE God— to place Him at the center of all we are or ever will be— to ask HIM to love us and forgive us and live in us— THIS is how we overcome SIN! And it is a relationship that never ends!

#241 *HIS WAY WITH THEE*

Would You Live for Jesus and Be Always Pure and Good

