

# Behold the Lamb!

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The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ...Again the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus" (Jn. 1:29, 36-37).

## Introduction

John (the last prophet of the Old Covenant era and the forerunner, or the one who was specifically called by God to introduce Israel to their Messiah) is the first person in the New Testament to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. His message, "Behold the Lamb of God," is not only the primary message of his own ministry but it is the central focus of all sacred Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. It is the very foundation of all true religion or biblical Christianity. Without faith in this message; without looking to Christ as He is revealed in the Bible, no one can be forgiven or saved or redeemed or possess eternal life. Therefore, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of John's declaration. No subject is more necessary, more loving, more sweet, more refreshing, more inspiring, more joyful or more sanctifying to the saint than the bloody cross of our Lord: "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Any philosophy or religion or worldview that does not make Jesus and His atoning death its central focus, its first and last, its all in all is worthless, evil, dishonest and vain. Before we focus on the meaning and application of our text, there are a few introductory matters to consider.

First, the occasion and the context of this message are noteworthy. Both before (Jn. 1:23, 27; cf. Isa. 40:3; Mt. 3:3) and immediately after John's announcement or identification (Jn. 1:30, 33, 34), the baptizer teaches that this One who comes as a perfect atonement for sin is God or Jehovah Himself—the Son of God. After his first meeting with Jesus where our Lord was baptized by John and then anointed beyond measure by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:32-33) John said, "I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God" (Jn. 1:34). With Luke 3:22 in mind ("And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased'"), it is clear that John used the expression "the Son of God" in the most exalted sense possible. The Messiah is God of very God, equal with the Father in every sense. The particular relation that exists between God the Father and God the Son is eternal (Jn. 1:1, 18; 3:16-18; 5:27; 17:5; 19:7; 20:31). John concurs with the Holy Spirit and the Father in publicly declaring that the redemptive Mediator is the Christ (the anointed One) and God the eternal Son who has come to earth from heaven and assumed a genuine human nature. This Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is totally unique. He is not just a man or another prophet but is both God and man in one person. This testimony is essential in understanding and defining the good news of Christ's saving work.

This is a point that cannot be missed, for a belief in Jesus as fully divine in every way is essential to genuine Christianity. It is a crucial doctrine that separates real Christians from heretical Unitarian religions (Judaism, Islam); and cults (Jehovah's Witnesses, The Unitarian Church, The Way International, etc.) and the ignorant, unbelieving masses. One must know Jesus as the Son of God if one is to know Him as the Lamb of God, for only one who is truly God could offer a sacrifice of infinite value to the Father. People love to speak kindly of Jesus' character and talk of His wonderful

teachings. They are willing to praise Him as a teacher and perhaps even as a prophet. But, if they do not believe in His divinity and eternal Sonship, their praises are worthless and dishonoring. No one can be saved or justified or forgiven of sin and guilt who does not believe Jesus to be God. A person can be an atheist or a Jew or a Muslim but one *cannot be a Christian*, for a belief in the gospel involves a belief in the person of Christ and who He really is according to Scripture (not our imagination or the false traditions emanating from a false prophet such as Mohammed, Charles Taze Russell, Joseph Smith, etc.). If Jesus was not God, He could have, at best, only died for one man, not for every nation. If Christ was not God, He could not be the object of our faith, worship, adoration and total devotion. Let us never forget that Jesus is the Lamb of God because He first is the Son of God—the Messiah. If we want to worship God, we must worship Christ.

Second, the passage is also illuminated by the historical context. The Pharisees (and the majority of Jews who were their followers) were not looking for the Lamb of God but rather a fierce Ram of God. They indeed were looking for the Messiah who was both a prophet and king but they had no yearnings for a Savior-priest. They wanted a powerful military king who, through brute force of arms, would crush their Roman oppressors. They had no concept of a spiritual salvific kingdom but only a carnal, worldly concept of rule. The Jews had no sense of their sin and need of a priestly Messiah. “It was under *these* circumstances that the forerunner of Christ announced Him as the ‘*lamb* of God,’ not as ‘the *word* of God,’ not as ‘the *Christ* of God,’ but as *THE LAMB*. It was the spirit of God presenting the Lord Jesus to Israel in the very office and character in which they stood in deepest need of Him. They would have welcomed Him on the *throne*, but they must first accept Him on the *altar*.”<sup>1</sup> There is a crucial lesson for all of us in this first gospel message. The bloody cross must precede the glorious crown. The kingdom of God is spiritual and is founded on the atoning—sacrificial death of Christ. There could be no exalted King at the right hand of God (who has absolute authority and carries the rod of iron to smite rebellious nations), if there was not *first* the Lamb of God who washes away the sins of His people with His own precious blood.

Third, the statement by John as to the words and the grammar is simple. The word “behold” is a favorite expression of John. It is an imperative and could be translated “look.” In both our verses, John first looks toward Christ and then commands his disciples to look toward Christ. God revealed to John, through His Spirit, who Jesus of Nazareth was and John in turn pointed his disciples to Christ – the Lamb of God. This (first and foremost) is the job of every gospel preacher. “The preacher’s eye should be *upon* his Master while he points to his Master. They preach Christ best who see him best.”<sup>2</sup> By crying out the imperative, “Behold!,” in a dramatic fashion while pointing men to Jesus, the baptizer riveted everyone’s eyes upon Christ and every ear would now listen to the forerunner’s message about Him. We must not forget that John the Baptist was a prophet; the command to look is God’s command. One must look and understand, before one can believe. The implication here is that if you do not know Christ as Lord and Savior, then it is your duty to seek Him out and learn of Him. How will you know His perfect love, His infinite wisdom, His awesome power and His unique and amazing work of redemption if you do not “look?”

Jesus is identified as “the Lamb of God.” The use of the article indicates the *one particular Lamb of God*. He is the Lamb like no other. There is one Lamb that saves and only one. The sacrifices of the Old Testament, Paul says, did not really remove sin (Heb. 9:9ff; 10:4ff). They—through types, symbolism and the accompanying rituals—pointed the Old Testament saints to the Lamb of God to come who really could remove sin. Beloved, there is only one Person in all history who can remove your sin and guilt: Jesus Christ. He is the door to heaven, the *only* door to heaven. If you want your sins

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1945] 1975), 1:58.

<sup>2</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, “Behold the Lamb” in *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 3:104.

blotted out, washed away or permanently covered, you must look to Him and no other.

When John says “the Lamb of God” he means the Lamb which belongs to God (the author in Greek uses the genitive of possession). Jesus is God's Lamb. He belongs to God in a unique way. As the eternal Son, He existed from all eternity with the Father and the Spirit. He was sent by God on His redemptive mission and thus, repeatedly, Jesus said that He came to do His Father's will. Although His human nature came by a special work of the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary (“that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” [Mt. 1:20; Lk. 1:31]), His incarnation was also a work of the Father: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God’” (Heb. 10:5-7; Ps. 40:6-8). The will of God was the salvation of the elect from all over the whole world. As Paul says in 1 Tim. 1:15, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” This task of being God's Lamb required a true human body, since the promise of salvation demanded the offering up of Himself as a bloody sacrifice in the place of sinners. He had to become a true man (in every respect like us, yet without sin [Heb. 4:15]) in order to die in our place. As the immortal Word, He was incapable of suffering, bleeding and dying; but, as the incarnate Son of Man, He could truly be the Lamb of sacrifice. What the little innocent lambs offered in the Levitical economy could *not* do (for they were only animals), Jesus the Lamb of God did. “The body of his incarnation, whereby he identified himself with our humanity and was capacitated to stand in our stead, was essential if the Son was obediently to hear and to do the will of the Father for our everlasting redemption.”<sup>3</sup> When John pointed the Jews to Jesus as God's Lamb, he was declaring that God's Lamb had now come for real, efficacious atonement. Jesus is the Lamb which God had promised to send into the world to be slain for His people.

The word “lamb” to a Hebrew audience would immediately convey the idea of a lamb for sacrifice. The lamb would be without spot or blemish. The lamb's blood would be shed to cover sin. “There can be no reasonable doubt that John gave this name to our Lord because He was the true sacrifice for sin, the true antitype of the Passover lamb, and the lamb prophesied of by Isaiah (Is. liiii. 7). The idea that he only refers to the quietness and the weakness of our Lord's personal character is utterly unsatisfactory”<sup>4</sup> and ignores the immediate context of verse 29. He is describing Jesus as the one who came as the great propitiation for sin. This crucial fact will be discussed in detail in a moment.

The statement that “the Lamb of God...takes away the sin of the world” is very clear. The word “sin” is singular because all the sins of Christ people are viewed *collectively* as one mass. All the sins of the elect (past, present and future) were imputed to Jesus, or reckoned to His account, as He suffered and died on the cross. Christ paid the penalty for sin that all His people deserved. As Paul says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13). In Romans 3:21-26, the apostle elaborates on this teaching: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Edgcumbe. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 397.

<sup>4</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*. (Cambridge, England: James Clarke, [1865] 1975), 1:60.

The word “sin” (*hamartia*) as a verb means literally “to miss the mark.” It is the most comprehensive word in Scripture for moral deviations or offenses against God. The apostle John defines sin as a transgression of God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4). In the Bible “sin” always results in a record of true guilt that merits the punishment of death (spiritual, physical and eternal) and hell. People in our modern antinomian/permissive society do not understand why sin results in real guilt and a curse from God (“the curse of the law” [Gal. 3:13]). The fact of sin, guilt and punishment can only be understood against the background of God’s perfect righteousness and holiness. God records the guilt of sin and renders a curse against sin because His righteous and holy character demands it. He reacts against sin with a holy hatred and indignation. David notes this reality in Psalm 5:4-6, “You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.”

What an exceedingly wicked thing sin is which makes the God of love and Father of mercies an enemy to His rational creatures - which caused Him to rain fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah and also led to the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. God is serious about sin and cannot overlook it. Did He not cast His beloved Adam and Eve out of the garden for only one sin? Did He not destroy His own city Jerusalem when it fell into idolatry and injustice? Did He not remove Israel from His sight when she rejected His Son and persecuted His saints? Sin is so evil, wicked, damnable and deserving of punishment that it could only be purged and washed away by the sinless blood of the Son of God. Oh that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes to see the supreme sinfulness of sin! Not only must you believe this if you believe the Bible; but, if you do not believe it, you will never see the beauty of Christ and flee to Him for safety.

All those who make light of sin and speak of nothing but God’s love, while ignoring the hundreds of passages that tell us of His hatred of sin (and sinners) and His holy wrath, are treasuring up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 2:5). Jesus Himself said that “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” in the outer darkness, in the flames of Gehenna. God hates impenitent sinners and all those who reject His beloved Son. Destruction and hell fire await them. Behold, the Lamb of God! Look to Him dying, suffering and bleeding on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin; for, if you do not, all the curses of the law, the threatenings of the gospel and all the judgments of hell will come upon you eternally.

The verb “takes away” conveys the notion of taking up, bearing off and, in this context, means a complete removal of sin. “The verb *airo* is rightly rendered ‘take away’ or ‘remove’ here. Where the *bearing* of sin is in view, the verb commonly used is *anaphero*, as in Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24. The two ideas, of course, are not mutually exclusive: the bearing of sin by another involves its removal from the one on whom it formally rested.”<sup>5</sup> All those who believe in Jesus have been forgiven of sin because their sin, guilt and liability of punishment were placed on Christ as He suffered and died (as He bore their sin) and thus the penalty has been forever removed because it was completely paid. True believers have been redeemed by the blood (i.e. the suffering and death) of the Lamb. The verb “take away” is in the present tense (“who is taking away,” present participle) because, when John spoke these words, Jesus was in the process of His redemptive mission. His whole life of humiliation, suffering and rejection was vicarious and came to a climax in His agony in the garden; as well as being tortured, crucified and buried. At the very moment that John spoke, Jesus was engaged in achieving salvation. The day before, He identified with His people by submitting to baptism to fulfill all righteousness (Mt. 3:15). Although, as the spotless Lamb He is without the sin of Adam and personal sin, He took the place of sinners in order to take their sins on Himself and bear them away by His suffering. Paul says,

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<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 53.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which is contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:13-14).

The “sin” that is removed by the Lamb of God is that of “the world” (*kosmos*). The universal note is emphasized in this gospel (e.g., 3:16ff; 4:42; 6:51) and the apostle’s first epistle (2:2; 4:14). It is also found in Paul: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). To the Jewish audience, this was a radical statement. The Lamb is taking away not merely the sin of one particular nation (Israel) but of the whole world (i.e. men from every tribe, tongue, nation and people [see Rev. 14:6]). Most evangelicals interpret this passage as teaching a universal atonement—that Jesus’ atoning death paid for the sin of *every individual* in the whole world without exception. Such an interpretation must be rejected not only because it goes beyond the plain meaning of the text, but because it explicitly contradicts the analogy of Scripture.

If we look at the meaning of Christ’s sacrificial death in Scripture, it is very clear that a universal atonement (i.e. for every individual in the world without exception) would mean a *universal salvation*. But it is obvious that most people in the world do not have faith in Christ and have received no benefit from Jesus’ death. There is no such thing as a hypothetical atonement in the Bible that becomes a reality only because men believe. Instead, union with Christ in His sacrificial death *guarantees* expiation (the removal of sin and guilt), propitiation (the removal of God’s wrath), reconciliation (the state of enmity between God and the believing sinner is replaced by harmony and fellowship), justification (the believing sinner is declared righteous in the heavenly court) and redemption (all of a person’s sins—past, present and future—are paid for in full). While it is true that a person is not forgiven and justified until he believes in Christ (i.e. he lays hold of His perfect redemption by the instrument of faith), people are regenerated and have faith because of the efficacy of Jesus’ death and resurrection. In other words, if Christ died for all, then all would repent and believe, for these things are gifts that flow from the Savior as well. Christ’s atonement is organically related to all the saving graces as a spring to a stream. When Isaiah 53:8 says, “for the transgressions of My people He was stricken,” the Pharisees (and their followers) interpreted “My people” as Israel. John, speaking by the Holy Spirit, tells us that “My people” refers to all the called and redeemed people throughout the whole world (i.e. spiritual Israel).

## Jesus is the Only Savior

Having briefly considered the meaning of our text grammatically, let us more fully contemplate its meaning for our edification. There are number of important things to consider.

First, the central teaching of our text is that Jesus, in His person (He is the divine and human Mediator) and work, is the only way to be saved from our sin and guilt. When John pointed men to Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, there was a temple standing in Jerusalem where sacrifices were offered for sin every morning and evening. The forerunner is acknowledging, by his declaration, that Christ is the One true sacrifice. He stands far above all others because the others were only pictures, symbols, types, representations and shadows that pointed to Him. There is only one efficacious, saving sacrifice in all human history, for the shadow sacrifices of bulls, goats and lambs only pointed men to the One true sacrifice. Paul says, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin” (Heb. 10:4). “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all,

having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11-12).

If the Jews had known their Scriptures and the meaning of the sacrifices, they would have understood who Jesus really was. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament were pointing men to Christ. In Genesis 4, Abel offered a blood sacrifice acceptable to God, while Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground was rejected. God does not accept human works or human concepts of salvation, He only accepts the blood of Christ. We cannot scheme or work our way into heaven. In Genesis 22:8, Abraham, by faith, said to Isaac “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” God did provide Christ the Lamb of God for His people. When Noah walked off the ark in Genesis 8, he offered a burnt offering to God and the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. This points to Christ who propitiates the wrath of God through His blood. In Exodus 12, the firstborn male lamb was sacrificed and its blood was placed on the door posts and lintel forming the shape of a cross. The blood of Christ saves His people from God’s curse. On the day of atonement (Lev. 16:15ff), the blood of clean sacrificial animals was sprinkled on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant which held the Ten Commandments. This tells us that Christ’s blood covers the sins of believers—their violations of the moral law. In Solomon’s Temple, every morning and evening, spotless lambs would be sacrificed for sin. Christ’s blood covers every sin of every day. In Isaiah 53:7, the Lamb slain for His people is personified. He is the Lamb who suffers and dies in the place of His people. There can be no question that the One prophesied to remove sin had to be a real man without sin. The Bible tells us that there is atonement for sin, that we can have all our sin and guilt removed. This removal of sin resulting in forgiveness and eternal life is only found in the cross of Christ. In His suffering and death alone is there remission of sin, for only by His sacrifice is the penalty of the law satisfied.

There are some other biblical allusions that flow from this title. The Lamb of the sacrifice had to be an offering of the flock (one’s livestock) and thus was a gentle, precious creature. Jesus was gentle and humble and voluntarily offered Himself to God on our behalf. Even more importantly, it speaks of the Savior’s sinlessness. He was the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19). All the animals offered for sacrifice had to be perfect specimens with no defects, injuries or diseases (Num. 19:2; 28:3, 9, 11, 17; 29:17; 26; etc.). Why was it absolutely necessary for Jesus to be a genuine man, yet without sin? Because if He were guilty of sin, He could only suffer for His *own* sins; He could not be a substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of others. By taking all the sins of His people on Himself (they are imputed or reckoned to His account), the guilt and judicial consequences of sin are paid for and thus forever removed for believers.

Second, let us consider the many implications of what it means to look to Christ. When John (as a prophet) commanded His disciples to look to Christ, he was not simply telling them to admire Him or view Him as one views a beautiful painting. He wanted them to embrace Christ by faith. He wanted them to understand who Jesus is (i.e. to accept his testimony and the Bible’s testimony concerning Jesus) and to trust Christ, or believe in Christ as Lord and Savior. To have knowledge is one thing; virtually everyone knows that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for people’s sin. But to believe in Christ is something far beyond mere knowledge. One can read the Bible or hear a good sermon about Jesus and His redemptive work and understand the effects of redemption; but only those who receive supernatural grace and have their hearts changed by the Holy Spirit look to Christ with faith. The unbeliever can perceive the facts of Jesus’ person and work. But to him they are myths, fairy tales or simply unimportant. The one who has true faith looks to Christ and contemplates His person and work and then continuously believes, embraces and trusts the whole testimony of Scripture regarding Him.

To help us understand this, we need to note a number of things about saving faith. First, saving faith must have the proper object, which is Christ as defined by the Scriptures. When John told his disciples to look to Christ, he defined who Christ is. He spoke eloquently of Jesus’ divinity and eternal

existence before the incarnation (Jn. 1:26-27, 30, 32-34). He noted that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy regarding the Messiah (Jn. 1:23) and he noted that Jesus' atoning sacrifice is the only way to have forgiveness of sin (Jn. 1:29, 36). He did not point men to an *undefined* Christ or teach that we can define Christ as we please. People who believe in a Christ of their own or a cult's imagination or the one popular in pagan culture do not have true faith and are not saved, for faith in a lie or an idol is useless.

This is precisely what modernists and cults have done and continue to do. The apostle John warned of heretics who deny Christ: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 Jn. 9). Gordon Clark writes, "Saving faith... is faith in Christ. But we must be careful not to empty the name of Christ of its New Testament meaning. Some ecclesiastical leaders want to restrict faith in Christ to such an extent that Christ becomes a mere name about which nothing is to be said. The general tenor of modern religion is so antagonistic to doctrine that the Virgin Birth, the two natures in one Person, and even the Atonement are said to be unessential. One must believe in Christ, they say, but not in a Christ who pre-existed as the second person of the Trinity, not in a Christ who was virgin-born, not in a Christ who rose from the grave. What Christ then do they believe in? The answer is, no real Christ at all. They have put their faith in an empty name; or, better, they have disguised their lack of faith by pious terminology."<sup>6</sup>

Second, saving faith is evidenced by following Christ the rest of your life. After John told his disciples to look to Jesus—the Lamb of God—we read, "The two disciples [John and Andrew, Peter's brother] heard John speak, and they followed Jesus (Jn. 1:37)." Many people say that they believe in Christ but if they refuse to follow Him, become His disciples and submit to His teaching, their faith is dead and worthless. We are not saying that following Jesus and obeying Him completes faith or contributes to salvation. Such thinking detracts from Christ's perfect work and is a doctrine of demons. But we are saying that a "bare assent" or a mere "intellectual assent" does not really grasp Jesus and His redemptive work. If one accepts the truth of Scripture as one might accept a history or teaching in which one is not personally interested, one is not born again. One's attitude and actions prove that one does not really love or care about Christ and His gospel at all. Many people who claim to be Christians habitually violate God's moral law, don't bother to attend church and couldn't care less about what the Bible has to say. They do not really believe. Saving faith is always accompanied by all the saving graces. Justification by faith alone always is connected to sanctification and perseverance. Turretin writes, "Faith is not true because it perseveres, but it perseveres because it is true. This perseverance is not the cause of the verity of faith, but the consequence and the effect—for because it has solidity and a deep root in the heart on this account it is constant and perpetually endures."<sup>7</sup>

The faith that secures eternal life is an activity of man but is always a direct result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit upon man's heart and, therefore, it is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Faith is produced in the heart as the Holy Spirit applies the testimony of Scripture to it, convicts a person of his sins, convinces him of the truths of Scripture and gives him a hearty trust in Christ and the gospel. As Paul says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). "The testimony of God is given through the Spirit, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us... The Spirit demonstrates the truth to the mind, i.e., produces the conviction that it is the truth, and leaves the soul to embrace it with assurance and delight."

This faith must be informed by the testimony of the sacred Scriptures. For the gospel to be

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), 147-148.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977) 2:592.

understood, a number of doctrines must be preached: the nature and character of God (Jehovah is infinitely holy and righteous); the law (the moral law is a reflection of God's righteous character); the incarnation (the eternal Son of God assumed a human nature in the womb of the virgin Mary and was born in Bethlehem); justification (we are saved solely by the merits of Christ); and the history and biblical meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The central focus is on Christ and His life, death and resurrection. As Paul says, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Note that the inspired apostle teaches that there is no such thing as an uninterpreted salvation event. Everything related to the gospel is defined by the Scriptures. Therefore, if you want to see Christ and be a disciple, you need to carefully study the Bible and sit under serious, exegetical Bible believing preaching. The more true knowledge that you have about Jesus Christ and His work of redemption, the richer and fuller your faith will be. Everyone who really believes in Christ will, of logical and biblical necessity, be ready and willing to accept God's testimony as a whole.

When we speak of faith, we do not mean an irrational leap in the dark or a willingness to accept what is absurd and illogical. Faith is founded upon facts: historical and doctrinal. It is irrational, absurd and foolish not to believe in Christ and the Word of God. If you have saving faith then you truly believe in Christ and the Bible. You embrace Him and trust in the Word of God. When the Bible describes genuine faith, it uses terms that emphasize not only an intellectual recognition but also a hearty trust or embracing of the truth. This is especially true of the terms used of belief in Christ. It is described as "coming to Christ": "He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (Jn. 6:35). "Coming" here is set in poetic parallel to believing. "It means that movement of the soul which takes place when a man, feeling his sins, and finding out that he cannot save himself, hears of Christ, applies to Christ, trusts in Christ, lays hold on Christ, and leans all his weight on Christ for salvation. When this happens, a man is said in Scripture language to 'come' to Christ."<sup>8</sup> It also is described as "looking to Christ": "Look to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isa. 45:22). The verb "look" (an imperative like our text) suggests a turning away from something (one's idolatry and false ways of thinking) to something else (Jesus Christ and the Bible). Faith is simple and is the sole instrument that lays hold of Christ. But faith implies conversion and repentance as *fruits* of faith. One must look *solely* to Christ, for a divided faith is not saving faith.

True belief is also compared to receiving Christ: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (Jn. 1:12). To receive Christ is to believe or trust in Him as Lord and Savior with the heart. It describes the faith which unites the sinner's soul to Christ. To believe on Christ is to receive Him and to receive Him is to believe on Him. While the term "look" implies a turning from faith in idols or vanity to the true God, the term "receive" implies that true faith flows from a heart that loves Jesus and thus embraces Him. Contrary to modern Arminian evangelicalism, it does not mean that we ask Jesus to come and dwell in our hearts. The moment we believe or trust in Him, He is already there by His Spirit.

Are you looking to Jesus Christ alone for redemption? Are you trusting and relying on Him solely for your salvation? Are you convinced of your sin and guilt before God? Do you acknowledge that even your best works are tainted with sin and that you can do nothing to save yourself out of your lost condition? Do you regard your own good deeds as filthy, stinking rags in God's sight so that you can look solely to Christ? Do you believe that Jesus removed all of your sin and guilt by suffering and dying on the cross in your place? Are you resting upon Christ and His righteousness for the pardon of

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<sup>8</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 1:371.

sin and the gift of eternal life? If you are weighed down with your sin and guilt, then have a fixed, unshaken trust and reliance on the Son of God, for He is the Lamb of God who takes away sin. I pray that God will give you a sense of your own sinfulness, hopelessness and insufficiency so that you will see the Savior's all sufficient fullness. He saves to the uttermost those who come to Him.

Regarding faith, there are a few other matters that merit our attention. (1) It is important that we keep in mind that saving faith is instrumental, not meritorious. We are not saved *because* of our faith; we are saved *through* faith. We are saved solely by Christ and it is faith which is a gift of God that lays hold of Christ. By way of analogy, we could compare faith to a metal ring which holds a very large priceless diamond. The real value lies with the diamond, not the steel ring. Faith could be compared to a hand that reaches out and grasps a priceless treasure or a life-saving medicine. Therefore, we always must keep in mind that it is Christ who saves. Our works contribute *nothing* and our faith contributes *nothing*. It is the Roman Catholic error which says that faith plus works leads to salvation. It is the Arminian error which says that we are saved by an act of the autonomous will that allows Jesus to save us. They teach we are saved *because* of our faith and not *through* faith. Remember, faith is a gift of God that flows from the efficacy of Jesus death and resurrection. If you have saving faith, God gave you that faith as a gift.

(2) It is important to focus all of our attention on Christ for salvation, for many genuine Christians have a weak and feeble faith. If your faith is weak and imperfect, do not fear or doubt your salvation, for you are saved by Christ who is infinitely powerful to save. Christians have faith in different degrees, some strong and others weak, but they all have Christ as Savior who has achieved a perfect redemption and won the victory. Therefore, rest assured in the merits of Christ. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. A person with weak faith may lack assurance of salvation but he is every bit as much saved as Isaiah, David or the apostle Paul. Christians should not make the mistake of looking to their faith when they need to be looking to Jesus Christ. The faith of a sinner can never be perfect, but the sinless life of Christ and His sacrificial death it lays hold of is perfect.

As you go on with your life after reading this, I want you to always keep in your heart John the Baptist's words: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." This is a command. This is an imperative that comes from God. God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe in His Son.

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