

The Fruit of Saving Religion

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The text I want you to consider is one that I've preached on once or twice in my nine years of ministry, and yet I want to turn to it again with no apologies because the Word of God is fresh, and new light has come to me in this text, or I have seen new light in the text. And one of the advices an old sage gave to young preachers was, "Don't be afraid to stay with the familiar and with those texts that God has blessed in the history of the church." Now the text is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

The context of this well-known text is Paul's description of his own experience as a Christian. He is speaking on the one hand of his confidence and expectation that when he's ushered out of this life into the life to come, he shall be ushered into the very presence of God. He says in verse 6, when we're present here in the body, we're absent from the Lord; if we're absent from the body, we're present with the Lord (vv. 6-9). And he says in the light of that, "I have one ambition: to be well-pleasing to my God because I know I must stand before Him" (v. 10). Then taking the suggestion of the thought of judgment, he says, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord in the light of the day of judgment, we're involved in seeking to persuade men of the truth of the Gospel." And he says, "As we do so, there are times when, as far as men are concerned, we are beside ourselves. They think we're crazy." And he says, "That's alright. In the light of the facts, let them think that, because I'm crazy in their eyes because of these great spiritual realities which mold and shape my life." He then moves from describing his own experience into this great statement of verse 17 in which he makes his experience illustrative of a general principle that is true of everyone who is a true Christian. So he argues from his own experience as a believer to the general principle true of all believers, and he says, "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."

You'll notice in your Bibles that the "he is" is in italics, indicating that those words are not in the original. You have a very, very unique structure of words. Most of the time the Apostle Paul hangs one thought to another with connecting words. But here you have three abrupt statements: "If any man is in Christ...a new creation...old things passed away...all things become new." And in giving us this statement, which is illustrated in his own experience, the Apostle then generalizes and gives to us a description of what I'm calling saving religion. And so I want to title the message tonight "Saving Religion: What It Is, and Do You Have It?"

As we think our way through the text, consider first of all the essence of saving religion. If you boil it down to its irreducible elements, what is the thing that makes true Christianity unique from everything else that's a substitute? It's this: "If any man is in Christ." Union with Christ is the essence of saving religion. What then is the

effect of saving religion? "A new creation." Whenever anyone is found in Christ, the effect of that union will be a new creation. That's the effect of saving religion. What then will be the fruit of saving religion? Well, he tells us: "Old things are passed away; all things are become new." And then someone asks the question, "How in the world does all this come to pass?" And in verse 18 in the first phrase, Paul gives us the root of saving religion: "But all things are of God." So you have, then, in this brief statement of the Apostle a beautiful digest, a symmetrical description of the heart of saving religion. And I want to press upon your conscience tonight saving religion, what it is, and then the question, "Do you have it?"

First of all, then, the essence of saving religion. "If any man is in Christ." This phrase "in Christ", as we've pointed out in our studies in Ephesians, is a key phrase in the New Testament doctrine of salvation. It occurs no fewer than some 150 times in the New Testament ("in Christ", "in Him", "in whom"). There are various shades of difference in the actual phraseology, but all of them pointing to this one pivotal doctrine that the essence of saving religion is nothing more, nothing less than vital union with the Son of God as He has been manifested as the Christ.

Now it's not without significance that Paul says, "if any man is in Christ." He doesn't say, "if any man is in Jesus." In other words, our union has peculiar and distinct reference to the Son of God manifested as Christ, that is, God's anointed Messiah, for the Greek word for Christ is the New Testament counterpart of the Hebrew word for Messiah. He is Jesus the Christ, the anointed One, the One appointed Mediator who has been constituted as a mediator in the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king. And therefore, the only Savior whom God sets before sinful men is not the man Jesus. The only Mediator is the man Christ Jesus. But as a mediator, God sets us before Him as His Christ, as His anointed One. And in that office of His anointed One, He is Prophet to teach us, Priest to forgive us and to intercede for us, and King to rule over us. And therefore, bound up in that very word "Christ" is all that God has revealed about His Son as the pre-existent Word. John 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Everything revealed about Him as the virgin conceived Son of God: sinless, crucified, exalted to the right hand of the Father, God's anointed One.

Now it is Christ who is constituted as a mediator, the reservoir of all spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:3 is a classic statement of this: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Now again, that's not without significance. For it is as God's anointed One, God's appointed Mediator, that all spiritual blessing is stored up in Christ Jesus. So then, God does not parcel out some forgiveness. God does not parcel out some peace. God does not parcel out some justification and parcel out some sanctification without distinct reference to His Son. Rather, having constituted Him the reservoir of all blessing, He takes sinners and places them into vital union with Him. And found in Him, they have all those blessings: peace, forgiveness, justification, sanctification.

A beautiful statement of it, of course, is 1 Corinthians 1:30: "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." So the essence of saving religion, then, is this union with Jesus as the Christ, not Jesus as the man of Galilee, Jesus as the healer, Jesus as the teacher. No, no, the essence of saving religion is union with Jesus as the Christ, God's Prophet, God's Priest, and God's King. Therefore, where there is

ignorance of the truth of Christ as the pre-incarnate Word, where there is ignorance of the truth of Christ as God incarnate, sinless, substitutionary in His death, mighty in His resurrection, glorious in His exaltation; where there is just some vague, nebulous, sentimental, existential movement of the heart to some Jesus, there is no saving religion. Saving religion must have some essential content of Biblical revelation, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Saving faith has this content to it, and the content is the revelation of the Christ of God.

So much, then, for the fact of this union, which essence is the fruit of saving religion. I've used the term "union with Christ". What is the nature of that union? Are we absorbed into the deity in some pantheistic way? No. The Bible gives us analogies. Now an analogy is not to be like an equal sign. If you say something is like something, you don't mean it is equal to. It's not identity, but likeness. And union with Christ is set before us in various likenesses, various analogies. The lowest level of analogy is that which Peter gives us in 1 Peter 2 where he says, "You are living stones built together into Christ to become a living temple." It's the union of one stone cemented to another stone in a physical structure, which together comprise the whole edifice. Then the concept of that union moves to a higher level when you move into Ephesians 5. There you have the union of a husband and wife where the Scripture says, quoting from Genesis, "The two shall be one flesh." And the Apostle Paul says, "This is a great mystery." And the longer one is married, the more one feels the profound insight of the Apostle's statement "The two shall be one flesh." They are still two, but they are one. Are they one, or are they two? Well, they're both. And there's a union, you see, that rises higher than the concept of mortar holding together two stones. And then it arises perhaps to its highest expression in a passage like John 15 where Jesus said, "I am the Vine, and ye are the branches." There is a common life flowing through the vine and all the parts of that vine, the branches. And He speaks of "I and you" and "ye and Me." And the whole concept of union, then, is set before us under the figure of a vine and a branch, husband and wife, stones cemented together in a temple.

Now what can we extract from these analogies without pressing them to the place where we do injustice to the truth of God? Well, obviously, certain elements are very, very much in the forefront. First of all, there is the matter of the permanence of this union, even as the union between stones and a building. This is no temporary thing. Once cemented together, they are together as long as the structure exists. And so our union with Christ is a union of permanence. When we rise to the concept of the vine and the branches, we come into this whole matter of a sharing of life. The same life which flows through the main part of the vine flows out into the branches. And so our union with Christ is union of life. When we think of the union of husband and wife, it is union of affection, union of purpose, union of goal, union in the total perspective of the outworking of life. And so by these various analogies, the Scripture leads us to believe that the essence of saving religion is union with Jesus Christ that brings together these various concepts of permanence, identity of purpose, common life sharing.

So as you sit here tonight thinking you're ready for the exodus because sometime in the past, whether three months, six months, six years, or twenty years ago, you came and did something with reference to Christ, you made some profession of faith in Him, you made a "decision" for Him, and that thing that you did or said you did or believed with reference to Christ has not brought you into vital life-union with Him so that in some measure you can say that from that point till now, "For to me to live is

Christ", my friend, you don't have saving religion. Your religion may have much of Jesus. It may have much of Christ in it. It may have much of the Bible and much of church. But if it falls short of vital union with Christ, it is not saving religion. "If any man is in Christ"--that's the essence of saving religion. And that union is constituted from God's standpoint by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:17: "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with the Lord." And then from the human standpoint, faith is the bond that cements us unto Him. And so the essence of saving religion is nothing less, nothing more than union with Christ, the Christ of Biblical revelation.

Now secondly, the Apostle tells us what the effect of saving religion is. Whatever this union with Christ is constituted, what is the effect? And it's as though the Apostle Paul in writing the text (for this is the force when you look at it in the original), picked up his pen, started to write, generalizing his own experience and the experience of all believers, and he says, "If any man is in Christ." (That's the essence of saving religion). Now he begins to think, "How shall I describe it? What has occurred when someone is in Christ? What words shall I use to describe the effect of this vital life-union with the Son of God?" He lays his pen down. His mind runs over all of the various pictures and analogies of spiritual life in the Scripture. Then the Apostle Paul says, "Ah, but there's one concept that will express it, one that will bring into focus the essential effect of saving religion." He picks up his pen, and without any connecting words, the ink is dried: "If any man is in Christ." Then he puts a dash and he writes the words "a new [creation]!" That's the force of how this thing reads in the original. It's as though you catch something of the Apostle's spirit as he considers the mighty effect of this union with Christ.

Why does he use the term "creation"? Well, I believe he uses it for two reasons, one of which we'll underscore our last point, the roots of saving religion. He first of all is indicating something of the magnitude of the change wrought by saving religion, and secondly, something of the source of the change wrought in saving religion. How great is the change when a man receives true, saving religion by union with Christ? Why Paul says it's nothing less than a creative work of God. O, he's the same person as far as his physical being is concerned. He doesn't get a new glob of gray matter. He doesn't get new arms, new hands, new feet, new nose. He might like new everything in all of those departments, but he doesn't get it. He's still the same person.

Paul gets up in the morning after Damascus and looks in the mirror-- same nose, same eyes, same bald head and all the rest if what tradition tells us is true. And yet he says, as he contemplates what happened to him and looks himself in the mirror, "Paul, you're not Paul. You are but you aren't. You aren't but you are." In other words, he was conscience of this change that made him a man described in 2 Corinthians 5 whose ambition is to please God, whose ambition is to be with Him, to look upon His face, whose whole lifestyle is governed by compassion to souls of men, constrained by the love of Christ. And He says, "There's only one reason why I'm like this. And there's only one reason why anybody's like this. Almighty God has put forth creative power."

The significant thing about any work of creation is that something is introduced from the outside that isn't there before the creative act is performed. That's the significant part. When God creates something, He brings something into being that was not there before. And so the Apostle Paul says the effect of saving religion is a new

creation. God doesn't come and take the old creation and merely refine it with a little bit of Jesus and God and the Bible. He doesn't come and take the old creation and simply redirect it into new channels. No, no, He makes a new creation.

According to Galatians 6:15, nothing else in true religious experience matters, for there the Apostle takes some of the most sacred religious rites of the old economy, and this is what he says about them: "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new [creation]." Notice how different is the emphasis. He didn't say circumcision is nothing or uncircumcision is nothing, but the making of a decision. That's the way modern evangelicals would have written the thing. They would say the important thing is not whether you're baptized, but if you've made your decision for Christ. Paul isn't concerned about your decision for Christ. He said nothing matters--circumcision, uncircumcision, decision, no decision. What matters is this: has Almighty God made you a new creature? That's what matters, for "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." That's the essential element.

So often we hear quoted Ephesians 2:8-9. But you can't understand them if you wrench from verse 10. Certainly it is "by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Now Paul says behind that salvation by grace through faith which has come to you Ephesians is this: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." There you have union with Christ and the new creation fused together as we have them in this text. And so as clearly as the text teaches that the essence of saving religion is union with Christ, so it teaches that the effect of saving religion is a new creation.

Ah, but someone says, "How can I tell if I have union with Christ and have been made a new creation? Well, you can tell from the fruit. And so the Apostle Paul answers that problem for us and says if there is union with Christ, the effect of which is a new creation, the fruit of that new creation and of that union with Christ will follow. And he describes it in this way: "The old things have passed away and [literally speaking] things have become new." It can't be the old becoming new. They passed away. If something passes away, you don't make it new. It's gone. And so he says, "The old has passed away; things have become new."

I usually don't introduce Greek lessons into our study of Scripture, but there is a beautiful subtlety of tenses here that really makes the backbone of this part the message. And so I do want to just introduce a little something if I may take that liberty. The tense he uses for "the old has passed away" is the tense that has the concept it's done once and for all. And he says, "The old has passed away." A beautiful statement of the radical transformation of the new creature in Christ Jesus. And then when he says things have become new, he uses a tense which means something started at a given point and it continues until now. The old has passed away once for all. The new has been introduced and abides. But you say, "What about the imperfections?" Listen, the imperfections are just some of the imperfections of the new. The old is passed, and as new men in Christ, we are not perfect new men. We are imperfect. But he says the fruit of saving religion is that there has been this radical transformation. The old things have passed--decisive breach and change. Things have become new.

Now looking in the general context, what are some of the old things that have passed away by virtue of union with Christ and by virtue of becoming a new creation? And

remember, this is not some extra special thing for extra special advanced saints. I remember one time in a series of meetings years ago preaching for a whole week on this text in a church down in Pennsylvania, and there was a sweet little teenage girl sitting there listening to the messages. And it became obvious that she was beginning to get distressed. And her distress was such that she sought out the preacher after a service one night to ask a question. She couldn't assail the exegesis of the text; she couldn't fight the Bible, but her question was this: "Mr. Martin, is that kind of Christianity for everybody?" You see what her problem was? When she saw what the essence of true, saving Christianity was, she was hoping, "Well, that's fine and nice, and I can't argue with that (it's in the Bible), but maybe God will accept some kind of secondhand experience." My friend, there is no secondhand experience. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."

Well, what has passed away? What has become new? Well, let me suggest just three things tonight. We could work out many more from the context and then ranging far and wide in the rest of Scripture. But first of all, the old position has passed; a new has come. Secondly, the old purpose has passed; a new has come. And thirdly, the old pathway has passed away; a new has come. What is the old position? When we are in a state of nature (we have not yet been joined to Christ in true saving religion), what is our position before God? Well, the Apostle very clearly indicates what that position is later on in this very chapter. For notice, after stating in verse 17, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new [creation]," he then goes on to say, "But all things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." In other words, before we are made a new creation in Christ, before we are joined to Christ, we are in a state of alienation from God, not reconciled face to face, but alienated in our state of sin. And in that condition of alienation, we are under the wrath and the judgment of Almighty God.

We do not have a righteousness that is acceptable before God. And so our position is that terrible position described in Scripture as under the wrath of God. In fact, Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we are by nature children of wrath. We come into this world in a position which finds us exposed and liable to the judgment of a holy God. And that position of judgment is unaltered by anything less than vital union with Jesus Christ. That's why the Apostle Paul uses the phrase in Ephesians 1:6 "We are accepted in the beloved One." And in this very passage, the latter part of chapter 5, he says, "Him who knew no sin, He made to be sin on our behalf that we may become the righteousness of God in Him."

May I ask you a very personal question tonight? What is your position before God? Are you reconciled to God through Christ? Is the righteousness of God in Christ your possession? If you say yes, then my question to you is, have you come to that possession as Paul did through union with Christ? And if you've been joined to Christ, you're a new creation. Therefore, if you claim to have the imputed righteousness of Christ and yet your life does not indicate that you are in vital union with Christ, there is no identity with His person in love and in devotion; there is no knowledge of Him as the Christ of God, dear friend, you're utterly deceived as to your position before God. If you are accepted in the beloved, you are accepted as a new creation, one who is in Christ Jesus. Blessed be God if we are in Christ, if we are a new creation, the fruit of that relationship is that old position of condemnation, alienation, wrath is past. All things have become new.

But then the old purpose has passed away. What was Paul's basic purpose in life before he was brought into union with Christ? What is your basic purpose if you're not in union with Christ? Well, look at verse 14: "He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves." There is no more profound description of the basic purpose of life in every person who is not joined to Christ than these three little words: "live unto themselves". What does it mean to be a sinner? It means that your purpose in life is basically it this: to live unto yourself. You've made yourself the goal of your existence. Your happiness, your pleasure are the things which you seek. Your idea of right and wrong are the rules by which you live. What pleases you becomes the bar of judgment between what you do and what you won't do. You live unto yourself. Self is the goal of your existence.

Now in some people that manifests itself in a life that even worldlings call a wicked life. Some man to please himself, if he's a business man, may run roughshod over all his competitors. He may be guilty of all kinds of dishonesty and chicanery. And his basic goal is he wants to accumulate money because that pleases him. And living unto himself, he openly flaunts any kind of sense of rightness and equity and sensitivity. And so we look at that man and we say, "He's a sinner." But you see, the person who is kind and gentle and sweet and loving and faithful to wife or husband, a good mother, a good father, there's no basic difference if they're not joined to Christ. For the reason they are loving and kind and gentle does not have reference to bringing glory to God. It does not have reference to living such a life out of regard for God's precepts unto His glory in the strength of His own Spirit. It's simply a matter of genes which determine the temperament, proper training and other influences in the realm of common grace. They just happen to be a nice person. But when you dig beneath the external differences between that crooked businessman, that harlot or that lecher and that nice, sweet person who has never been joined to Christ, the substructure of life is exactly the same--living unto themselves. And that's the height of human wickedness.

You were not made to live to yourself. You were made to live unto Him who made you. You were made to find great delight in acknowledging that He is God and that He made you, and that as God, He has a right to govern you, and that as God, all that you have should ultimately issue in the praise and the honor of His name. But Paul says the fruit of saving religion is this: that old purpose, living unto self, has passed away; a new purpose has been introduced. Look at it (the last part of the verse): "that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto [the church? but unto the standards of Mom and Dad? but unto an artificial code of conduct imposed by society? No, but unto] Him who for their sakes died and rose again."

That new purpose which is always the fruit of saving religion is nothing less, nothing more than living unto Christ. And what does that mean? Well, simply speaking, it means this: that the will of Christ as found in the word of Christ becomes the governing principle of my life. "Lord, what will Thou have me to do?" That's why Jesus said the mark of His sheep is they hear His voice. It means, in the second place, not only that you receive direction for life from Christ, but you carry out those directions with reference to pleasing Christ. Look at verse 9 of this very chapter, one of the very things that led Paul to write this. He said,

"Wherefore also we make it our aim [when people are aiming at something, there's concentration, whether it's a man aiming his bow, aiming his gun. I don't care what it

is. Aiming at something is a focused, concentrated activity. Paul says we make it our aim. We're shooting at something in life. And what is he shooting at?], whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him."

What are you shooting at? What are you aiming at? I don't mean what are you doing like the drunken cowboy going through town at 3 in the morning with his six guns blazing, not aiming at anything, just shooting, having a great time. No, no, he says, "We make it our aim to be pleasing unto Him." This is the purpose that dominates the new creature who is in union with Christ. There is that precise aim to please the heart of the One who died and rose again.

May I ask you again a very simple yet pointed question? Is that the conscious focus of your life? Is that the purpose which dominates and shapes and molds your life? Let me make the question a little more pointed. Is the purpose which dominated and molded your lifestyle from June 13th last Sunday to June 20th today in the home amidst all the pressures and responsibilities of being a mother and a wife, a husband and a father, earning the bread and all the rest? You kids, amidst all the things that you've done this week (some of you with school out), your playing, your interaction with brothers and sisters and your time at the table and in the playroom and in all the areas of life, has this purpose been the substructure of all that you've done? Have you been consciously aiming at pleasing Him? I don't ask if you hit a bull's-eye everyday, but is this what you were aiming at? You see, you don't aim at something unconsciously. If you're aiming at something, it is a conscious experience. I want to press that on your conscience almost relentlessly because I fear some of you will be tempted to slough it off as just another part of the sermon. My friend, the reality or the lack of reality of your professed Christianity may pivot on an honest answer to that question. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away [not only the old position of condemnation and guilt giving way to the new position of acceptance and reconciliation, but an old purpose, living unto one's self, radically transformed to a new purpose, living unto Him]."

Mark first of all, as we've seen, by receiving directives from Him, by consciously seeking to be pleasing to Him, and thirdly, desiring that in all things He may be glorified. For whatever blessing comes to us or through us, whether you eat or drink (the most mundane activities), whatsoever you do, do all to the glory, to the praise of God. "He has saved us," Peter says, "called us out of darkness into light that we should show forth the virtue of the One who has thus called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." Is that the purpose of your life, not theoretically but practically? What's your answer? I plead with you to answer as honestly in the court of your own conscience as you'll be forced to answer in the day of judgment. Is that your purpose? If you're a new creature in Christ, it will be because Paul says, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new." Now that purpose is not perfectly accomplished (I said you don't always hit a bull's-eye. Sometimes you may completely miss the target, and there may even be times when you lay your gun down), but the overriding drift and bent of your life has been radically transformed according to verse 15: no longer living unto yourself, but living unto Him who died and rose again.

So you see, on the one hand, this slays the idea that one can be in Christ by virtue of His profession of faith or by virtue of his Godly nurture and have no radical difference in his life (it's foolishness). And on the other hand, it slays the idea that you can trust in Christ and yet not be radically transformed by Christ. There will be the new

purpose, and then that in turn will give birth to the new pathway: "If any man is in Christ, [a new creation]: the old things are passed away [not only the position and purpose, but the pathway that you walk, for your purpose determines your pathway]." If your purpose is to go up into New England as some of our people did this past week on vacation, then the path, the road you choose will be governed by your purpose. And so if your purpose is to live unto Him, the path you choose will be governed by that purpose.

Now what is the old pathway that we walk? Well, it's described in vivid detail in passages such as Ephesians 2. Listen to Paul's description of the pathway that all of us walk before we are new creatures in Christ:

"And you did he make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein ye once walked according to [this was your pathway] the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind...."

You know what Paul says our pathway was? It was a pathway laid by the accumulation of our natural desires, the lust of the flesh and of our mind, that is, the bodily appetites which craved for satisfaction. When they cried out, we listened to their cry, even though to heed their cry meant to trample under foot God's law, God's precepts. He says "That's alright." Whatever course the passions of our flesh dictated, we fulfilled them. And then he said there was a lust of our minds. When our minds dictated that we should think in certain directions, even though we had to, as it were, fly into the face of divine revelation, we fulfilled the desires of the mind. The mind has fallen along with the rest of man's being, and it's lusts and desires have become inordinate. And Paul said the path we walked was made up of the stuff of fleshly passion, of mental depravity. And then he says thrown into that was the overriding and the under girding influence of the very devil and evil spirits, "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the sons of disobedience." Thrown in some of the other construction material, he says is the very course or the very spirit of this age--what John says is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. That was our pathway, and that's the pathway everyone of you walks by nature. That's the path I walk.

But "if any man is in Christ, [a new creation]: the old things are passed away." That pathway is gone, and there is a new pathway. And what is the new pathway? John contrasts it by saying, "The world passes away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." The new pathway is doing the will of God so that now I gratify my natural physical appetites in subordination to the revealed will of God. I discipline my mind to function within the revealed will of God. I refuse to think any thought that means I must contradict divine revelation just as much as I refuse to walk in paths that mean I must violate divine precepts. No longer is my pathway determined by the spirit of this world, which says, "Be this kind of a man. Be that kind of a woman. Let this be your goal." No, no, Paul says, "God forbid that I should glory save in the Lord Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." He said, "The world doesn't dictate my pathway. The world and its standards and its goals have no more power over me than a crucified man upon a cross. I don't hear him, I don't submit myself to him, I have no attachment to him. The world is crucified unto me."

I would ask you as you sit here tonight, do you have this fruit of saving religion? Has the old pathway passed? Can you say with judgment day honesty,

"Thank God, my path is no longer framed by bodily appetites alone, by mental appetites, by the world, and by the devil. But the path that I walk by the grace of God is framed by the Word of God. And I walk in the power of the Spirit of God, not perfectly, sometimes more effectively than others, but thank God, that's the path I now walk."

Can you say that? If you can, you shouldn't have trouble with assurance, for you never have the fruit of saving religion without the root. And if you have a new pathway and the old is passed, and that pathway flows out of a new purpose, the old is passed. And that new purpose is the fruit of your new position ("accepted in the Beloved"), and the old is passed. The only reason you have the fruit of saving religion is because you have the root. Old things pass away only if men are new creatures, and men are only new creatures if they're in Christ. So you who have trouble with assurance can argue from the fruit back to the root. But there are others of you who ought to have trouble with assurance because you claim to have the root but you don't have the fruit. You've got no right to believe you're in Christ. Why? Because you're not a new creation. And what's the evidence you're not a new creation? The old things have not passed. It doesn't say they ought to pass, it's good if they pass, they will eventually pass. If you're in Christ, the very virtue of that mighty work of God has caused the old to pass, and the new has emerged.

Then we close with just a brief consideration of the first phrase of verse 18. It's as though someone says, "Yes, Paul, when saving religion comes to a man, when there is this new creation, when there is the effect and the fruit of this, where should we look in giving the praise? And if we don't have saving religion, where shall we look in order to get it?" And he points us in the right direction: "But all things [and in the context, the 'all things' are the things that he's been referring to in verse 17] are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." And so Paul who gives us the essence of saving religion (union with Christ), the effect of saving religion (a new creation), the fruit of saving religion (this new position, new purpose, new pathway), now tells us the fruit of saving religion: all things are of God.

Someone has said, and I believe wisely said, there are only two kinds of religion in the world. There's the religion of free will in which what you do makes the difference and in which what you have done becomes the point of glory. The other religion is the religion of free grace in which what God has done makes the difference, and in which what God has done becomes the focus of our praise and our glory. And there's only two religions in the world: free will and free grace. Now you've got all kinds of different names for both, but there are only two. And this is not just oversimplification. If you check into the heathen religions all the way to some of the refined so-called expressions of Christianity that falls short of the perspective that we've looked at tonight, at the core you will find this error: the difference between those who have true religion and false religion, according to them, is what you have done. And therefore, the testimony focuses upon what I have done and what I have accomplished. If you want to know how tragically this has affected much of so-called evangelical Christianity, just read the so-called testimonies of people who have been converted under this type of Christianity. Listen to them talk; ask them, "Are you a Christian?" And if they say, "Yes", say, "How did you become a Christian?" And then

be prepared to have your ears inundated with the word "I". "I did this. I decided. I made a decision. I, I, I, I, I, I."

That isn't the way Paul viewed his conversion or the conversion of any true child of God. His language is Theo centric (God-centered). We see it in this passage: "If any man is in Christ...a new creation...old things passed away...all things become new." And it's if someone would say, "Yes, Paul, but didn't..." He shuts them up before they can open their mouth, and he says, "All things are of God." They flow out from Him in sovereign grace and in sovereign mercy. That's why when Paul describes his own conversion, he uses these words: "But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me." Who is doing the acting? Paul or God? He's focusing on the activity of God.

Look back to chapter 4 in this very epistle. He's describing the conversion of himself and the Corinthians. How does he do it? Look at verse 6: "Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "Why are you a Christian, Paul?" He says, "God turned a light on. I didn't turn it on. He made the light and He flipped the switch." The same God who spoke into the black darkness of that primeval order and said, "Light", and out of darkness, light shined. No light in there, but light shined. Why? God created it. And Paul said, "That same God did something akin to that. In my poor sin-darkened heart, God did something."

So, in the root of saving religion, all things are of God. It's what God has done; therefore, God gets the praise. Saving religion is marked by this principle. And though men may not be accurate in what they say with their lips--and we must be careful here. Some of you who are young and immature will take a principle like this and go out and use it like a baseball bat and clobber the head of everyone you meet who maybe doesn't phrase his testimony accurately. Now God help you if you do that. Don't you blame that on me if you go out and leave bloody heads and say, "I learned that at the Trinity Baptist Church." You didn't learn to go around bloodying up heads with theological baseball bats. You didn't learn that here. Just be careful--and I feel constrained to give that word of caution. But even in spite of that word of caution, if we view our salvation Biblically, then in spite of imperfect phraseology, it will break through that we are what we are because God put forth the arm of His power. All things are of God, that is, of the sovereign activity of the Father, and secondly, of the saving activity of the Son. "All things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself."

In closing, may I apply that principle to your conscience tonight? Does your professed religion have this perspective? In other words, is it the reflex response of your heart to say, "Whatever I know of true religion, whatever I know of Christ, whatever I know of being a new creation, whatever I know of my old position, my old purpose, my old pathway passing away and all things becoming new, whatever I know experientially, this much I know: it is all of God." I'm not asking, "Have you learned to say those words?" That's easy. But have you been taught in your deep heart of hearts that this is true? Have you had sufficient acquaintance with your own native corruption and defilement, with your own blindness and love of sin that you know if God had not put forth His arm of power, it never would have been done. Have you been taught to say from the heart, "All things are of God"? When you look in the mirror like Paul did, ask yourself the question as he did, "How can I explain you, man?" He says, "There's only one way to explain me. God did something." When you look in the mirror, are

you forced to say, "What I see and what I know of that person has no explanation but that all things are of God"? Or can you look in the mirror and say, "Well, whatever there is there can pretty well be explained in terms of genes, culture, self-helps, resolutions." Is that the explanation of your life? If so, my dear friend, you have something less than saving religion.

So I close where I began. Saving religion--what is it and do you have it? What is it? This text tells us. The essence of it is union with Christ ("If any man is in Christ"). The effect of it: a new creation. The fruit of it: old things pass away; all things become new. The root of it: all things are of God. Is that your religion? Children, moms, dads, visitors, friends, church members, is that your religion? If not, you better scrap it tonight and cry out to that great God who is still in the holy business of making new creatures. And cry unto Him that He would for Christ's sake have mercy upon you, that He would take out that heart of stone and give you a new heart, that He would be pleased to subdue your rebel will and bring you captive to His dear Son. O dear people, whom after a couple of weeks I'll not see for some six weeks. It's been the longest time in nine years that we've been away. I believe before God I have some genuine concerns that you have nothing less than saving religion. It may pass here, but it won't pass there. God help you to be content with nothing less.

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