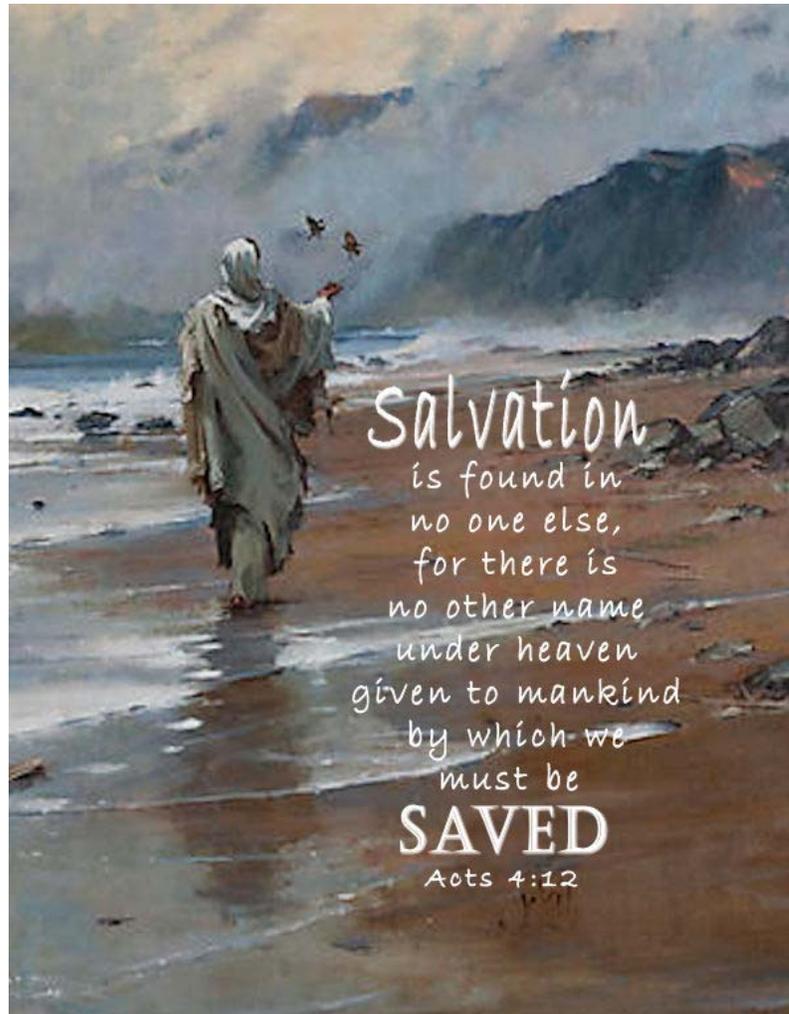


Who Can Come? How Do You Come?



**A Sermon Preached and Lessons
Taught by Pastor Kevin Redig
April 2016**

Foreword

I believe this little booklet will stand on its own in terms of clearly explaining a number of important truths from the Word of God. However, I want you to know that the message of this booklet was taught within a broader context. For it was originally given as part of a series on the Church. As a fellowship of believers, it was our goal to learn the principles and practices by which God designed the Church to function and bring glory to Himself. And so we found ourselves in the Book of Acts, going chapter by chapter, and learning the most marvelous things—things largely set aside in our day but nonetheless still just as relevant today as they were in the early days of the Church.



And so, as we arrived in Acts 9-11, with Peter's ministry drawing to a close, we studied the text which provided the backdrop for this message and subsequently this booklet.

I trust this message will be as much of a blessing to you as it was for me to preach it to the saints of VCC!

In His grace,

Kevin Redig

Introduction

Chapter 9 of the book of Acts is best known for Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, but it also continues the storyline of Peter's ministry. Chapters 10 and 11 contain the last major narrative involving Peter, at which point a transition occurs. Over the next few chapters, the emphasis shifts from Peter's ministry to Paul's and from evangelistic activity within the land of Israel to ministry outside of Israel and directed to a primarily gentile population.

Although we will be closing out the ministry of Peter, as recorded in Acts 9-11, that is not to say that things are winding down. For this is a very important portion of Scripture, which clearly shows God's unfolding plans for His Church. In particular, the narrative involving Peter and a Roman centurion named Cornelius can be of great help in our day. For it makes clear precisely how desperately needy is the plight of man and it underscores with great clarity how we receive what God has done to meet that



need. Our goal is as straight-forward as our title. For we simply want to ask and answer these questions:

*Who Can Come?
and
How Do You Come?*

The Narrative

Open your Bible and follow along beginning in Acts 9:32. The narrative begins with Peter visiting the believers who live in Lydda. The map below will help you place all three of the cities we are going to discuss. Lydda is part of the coastal plain that lies west of the mountain range that runs between Samaria and Jerusalem. Joppa, our next stop, is about ten miles to the northwest on the coast. Our final stop will be the residence of Cornelius in Caesarea, which is on the coast about 40 miles north of Joppa.

While in Lydda, Peter comes in contact with a man named Aeneas who had been bed-ridden for eight years. In a statement clearly ascribing the source of healing, Peter says:

“Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you.”



Not surprisingly, many of those who observed the outcome of this miracle “*turned to the Lord.*” I am particularly interested in the meaning of the phrase “*turned to the Lord.*” But before attempting to interpret it for you, let’s move on to Joppa.

Ten miles away from Lydda on the coast in Joppa, we are told there was a disciple (believer) named Tabitha, which somehow sounds much more feminine than her name in Greek, which is Dorcas. Tabitha was renowned for her good works, particularly the making of clothing for others. She died of an undisclosed illness. Because the believers in Joppa had heard Peter was nearby, they sent for him. With Peter’s arrival, we have a second miracle, this time Tabitha comes back to life.

The word spread quickly throughout Joppa, and again we have a very important outcome:

...many believed on the Lord.

There is no doubt what has happened here, people have placed their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and have been saved. By saved, I mean they have changed their eternal destiny from one of damnation to one of eternal life! In fact, I will try to show you by looking at the broader context that this is exactly what happened in Lydda as well, when many “*turned to the Lord.*”

Now we are going to look at Peter’s interaction with Cornelius in detail, but, before we do, I want to complete the flow of what is happening as the result of Peter’s ministry. People are turning to the Lord in Lydda, they are believing on the Lord in Joppa, and what is happening in Caesarea? If you look ahead to Acts 10:43, you will see Peter closing out his message to Cornelius and all his family by saying:

...all the prophets witness that, through His name (the name of Jesus Christ), whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.

Verse 44 documents exactly the same outcome as Lydda and Joppa. People, this time Gentiles, are getting saved. And if we push further still into Chapter 11, we will find Peter giving a report to the Church back in Jerusalem. Here is what he says:

*If therefore God gave them the same gift
(the Holy Spirit) as He gave us when we believed on the
Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God.
When they heard these things they became silent; and
they glorified God saying, "Then God has also granted
to the Gentiles repentance to life."*

With this grand close on Peter's ministry, we have all the information we need to not only answer our two question but also to draw some very important conclusions with respect to God's so-great salvation!

Answering the Questions

Let's go all the way back to the beginning of Peter's ministry in Acts, Chapter 2. There it tells us,

...those who gladly received His word (to receive the word is to believe it) were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. Acts 2:41-42

In Chapter 4, more in Jerusalem believed. In Chapter 8, those in Samaria are added to the company of those who have believed. Also in Chapter 8, we have an Ethiopian who comes to faith. In Chapter 9, more Jews, and now in Chapter 10, a Roman Centurion of the Italian Regiment. I believe we have just answered our first question: "Who Can Come?" Specifically in the text are mentioned: Jews of Israel; Jews from the Gentile nations; Samaritans; those from the ends of the earth (for we have previously learned that, in those days, this was a common way to refer to the land of Ethiopia); and then those from the *center of the world*. Rome at that time was the center of power with respect to the Middle East.

Who Can Come?

*And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires,
let him take the water of life without cost.*

Revelation 22:17

I want us to take encouragement in the scope of God's great offer of salvation. It is available for every member of the human race! In fact, if we look more closely at the representative list of people who have been saved in Acts 2-10, we will find, racially, the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth, the three sons of Noah! From another perspective, we see that God has provided a salvation that is available to those of every race, tribe, and language.

As we ponder these remarkable conversions, we can see that not only has God provided salvation for the Jews, but those partially Jewish in terms of the Samaritans, and then Gentiles in the person of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:37). Not only has He provided salvation for the Gentiles, but even for the hated Gentile occupiers of Israel, represented by a Roman Centurion named Cornelius. (Acts 10:44).



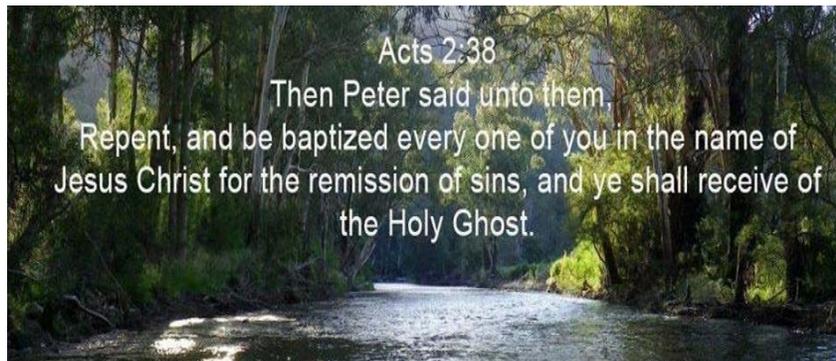
By the end of the narrative in Acts 10, Cornelius and Peter are now brothers in Christ and share a bond closer than that between Peter and unbelieving Jews. Who can come—the occupier and those occupied. In just a few chapters, we will see the prisoner and the jailer can come. The devout man and the one immersed in the occult can come (Acts 8:9-f). Every man needs the salvation that is offered as a gift from God through the work of Christ, and no man is so far away that the gift is inadequate to cover that need. Who can come?

...Whoever desires, let him take the water of life without cost.

Everyone and anyone can come who will come in the way God has provided. That naturally leads us to a very important follow-up question: *How Do We Come?*

How Do We Come?

We have two interesting bookends on Peter's ministry. He closes his first great message in Acts 2 with these words:



And then we have the observation by the Church in Jerusalem after Peter gives his report on the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 11:

*Then God has also granted to the Gentiles
repentance to life. Acts 11:18*

If we look closely at the events associated with the conversion of Cornelius, we will find reference to the same baptism, remission of sins, and pouring out of the Holy Spirit as found in Acts 2. (See Acts 10:43-44.) What I want you to see is that the *details* associated with salvation are exactly the same in Acts 11 as they were in Acts 2. So, in terms of answering the "*How do we come?*" question, it must involve repentance.

Furthermore, if we look at the times when the lost are getting saved in Chapters 2 through 11, this is what we find:

- In Acts 4, “*many who heard the Word believed.*”
- In Acts 4:12, we have that great declaration that salvation is found in no other name than that of Jesus Christ.
- In Acts 5, we learn that the disciples never stopped “*preaching Jesus as the Christ.*”
- In Acts 8, Philip went to Samaria and “*preached Christ to them*” and they “*believed Philip as he preached the name of Jesus Christ.*”
- In Acts 8, even Simon the sorcerer “*himself, also believed.*”
- As Acts 8 closes, the Ethiopian Eunuch declares, “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*”
- In Acts 9, many in Lydda “*turned to God*” and many in Joppa “*believed on the Lord.*”
- In Acts 10, Cornelius and many of his friends and household “*believed.*”
- In Acts 11:18, the receipt of the Holy Spirit by Cornelius and his household is evidence of their “*repentance to life.*”

In summary, if we trace those being saved during the spread of the early church as recorded in Acts 2-11, we will find that those saved repented, believed, believed, believed, turned to God, believed, believed, and repented.

How do you come? We are not fully ready to answer that question, but it most certainly must involve belief in the *name* of Jesus Christ and repentance!

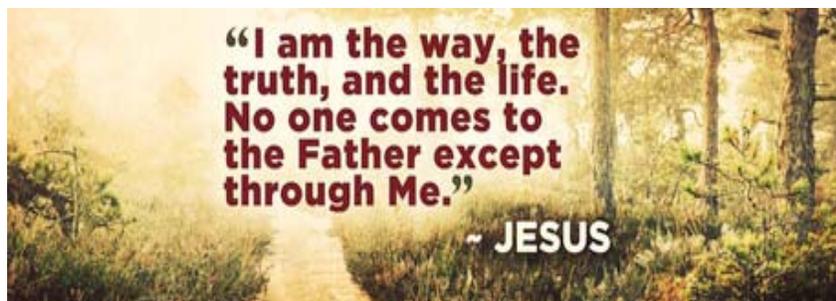
Two Things or One?

Let's press further by asking the question, "Are belief and repentance meant to be two things or one?"

Many have said, "These are two things!" But, in doing so, they have distorted the concept of Biblical repentance by falsely placing two hurdles before an unbeliever which they must somehow get over in order to be saved! These false hurdles are presented something like this:

- Repentance means that you must hate your sin to be saved. It means that you must forsake this sin, that means stop doing it. In other words you must be transformed in order to be saved. This version of repentance would mean, as the saying goes, *the tiger must change its stripes* as a prerequisite to being saved.
- And by the way, as a lost person you can't actually do this and so God has to do it for you. God has to give you the repentance necessary to be saved. If He gives it to you, then you can be saved. If He doesn't give it to you, then you are out of luck.

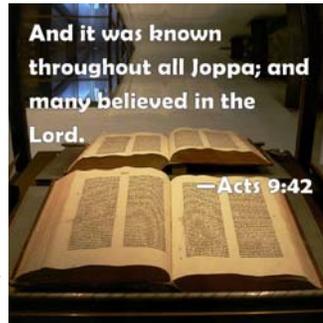
These are views, especially the first item on repentance, that have been promulgated widely and repeated often (you probably learned something like this in Sunday School). In fact, it is probably almost a reflexive, *knee-jerk* reaction should I ask you to define repentance. However, there is one very important issue to consider, do we find this definition of repentance in Scriptures?



We have many people being saved as the Church grows and builds momentum in Acts 2-9, and we have repentance clearly in view. But is it presented as a requirement to forsake your personal sins? Does it look like something that God has to give you? Is it one of two requirements for salvation (repent and believe), or is it better understood as part of the one response necessary to be saved?

We already know enough to address this last question. For if it is necessary to do two things, then something is wrong with the Gospel as presented in Acts 2-11! Although both the words repent and believe are used, they are **never** used together! As the chapters unfold, people are, on several occasions, told to repent and, with even more frequency, simply told to believe. If you do, in fact, need to do two things to be saved, then in every case these people were given an incomplete Gospel message, since they were told to do one or the other.

Was the Gospel they heard inadequate to save? The text proves otherwise! As we continue, please consider with me that repentance and belief somehow fit together such that correctly communicating either one to a group of lost people could give them the truth necessary to be saved.



Perhaps you are asking yourself, "Why is this an issue?" Consider this: if the Bible portrays one way of salvation, and we mistakenly construct another then we are holding out a false gospel. We must avoid this at all costs, for we would never want to mislead people about what it is that is necessary for them to be saved and receive eternal life. We should never want to put unnecessary or impossible hurdles between a lost person and salvation! Do you see how much is at stake?

Let me start to unravel some of this for you. I want to be as clear as possible so there is no misunderstanding. Everyone who “*turns to Jesus Christ*” and places his or her faith in who He is and what He accomplished at the cross has repented. Stated another way, you cannot be saved without repenting.

However, here is the issue, is it intrinsic to the Biblical meaning of repentance to have a requirement to forsake (to know and stop) your sin? How much of your sin? Presumably all of it! Those who take this position, see this meaning every time they see the word repentance. We need to investigate whether it is used that way in the Bible. Consider Heb 7:21:

The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Greek words translated *change His mind* in the above verse are the same as those translated *repentance in the New Testament*.

Now back to our question: Is it intrinsic to the Biblical meaning of the word repentance that there is a turning from sin? Does sin even need to be in view? Apparently not, for that would suggest that the above passage from Hebrews is telling us that God has decided not to turn from sin. The truth, with respect to the Greek language, is that the basic meaning associated with the Greek nouns and verb translated repentance is *to change one's mind*.

A person could most certainly change his or her mind about sin. The point is, however, that the context determines what it is that a person is changing his or her mind about. That raises the following essential question, with respect to a person being saved, what is it that the person needs to change his or her mind about? The answer to this question is crucial because eternity is on the line.

There are two ways to answer this question. We can go to theological writings and see what men have to say on the repentance issue. However, I would like to suggest that the best way to answer this or any theological question is to go to the text of Scripture. So, let's go to Scripture and see what kind of repentance is going on in the context presented. That should settle the issue for us.

In Acts 2:38, where Peter tells the people of Jerusalem to "repent and be baptized," does he mention forsaking their sin? What does the text say? The Spirit-filled Peter boldly tells them that the Jesus they crucified is both Lord and Christ. You see, a few short days previous to the day of Pentecost, these people had acquiesced to the crucifixion of Jesus on the charge that He was a blasphemer for claiming to be the Son of God. In truth, not only was He the Son of God, but He was also the one anointed by God to be the Messiah!

Do you see the context? Peter is calling the very same people who had cried out "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" to change their minds about who Jesus is—not blasphemer, but God and Savior.



Many did and the Church began. Note the following passages of scripture and notice the parallels:

- Acts 4:12: As the church began to grow, the message preached to the Jews of Jerusalem and the Jews visiting Jerusalem from the surrounding nations focused on faith in the “name” of Jesus.
- Acts 8: When Philip went to Samaria, he preached Jesus to them and they believed.
- Acts 8: The Ethiopian Eunuch heard about Jesus as described in the Old Testament and he believed.
- Acts 9: In Lydda and Joppa, the people to whom Peter ministered “turned to the Lord” and “believed on the Lord.”
- In Acts 11:17: Peter documents that Cornelius and his family “believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” just as the apostles had done.
- In Acts 2-11, we have covered everything from the *ends of the earth* to the *center* of the earth, Jew and Gentile, devout man and sorcerer. What do we find with respect to repentance? Is sin even discussed? Do we see people being told they must regret their sin, hate their sin, turn from their sin, and promise to never do it again, and believe too? **NO, NOT EVEN ONE TIME!**

Before we make up our minds on this matter, let's go to the Gospel just preceding the book of Acts. I want you to consider the Gospel of John because it is the only Gospel that tells us exactly why it was written:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. John 20:30-31

The Gospel of John is organized around eight miracles for one reason, so that those who read it would believe in Jesus Christ and, as a result, receive eternal life. This is the one Gospel that focuses upon obtaining eternal life. How many times is some form of the word *believe* used? Ninety-nine! How many times is some form of the word *repentance* used? Not one single time.



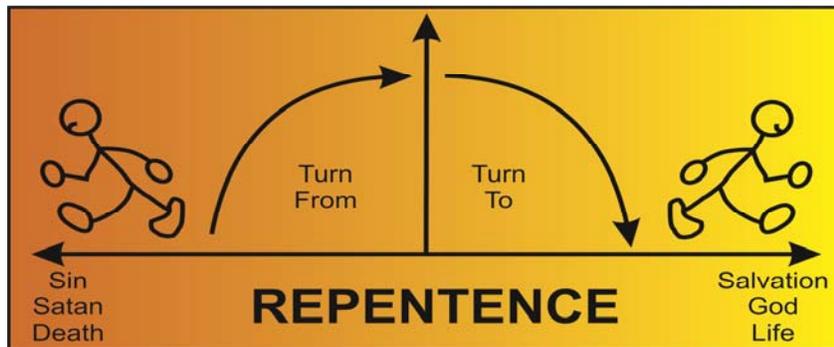
And let me remind you of who is doing the evangelizing in John's Gospel? Who is the one calling lost people to faith? It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! I am not saying there is no repentance going on in the Gospel of John, for many people are coming to a *change of mind* with respect to the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. As a result, they are receiving eternal life. What I am saying is this: Jesus had ample opportunity to tell people to *forsake their sin* as a condition for eternal life and He never did. Instead, He called those to whom He ministered to place their faith in Him as the one way of salvation and as the one way of coming to the Father.

Again, I want you to hear what I am saying. In Acts 2-9 we have plenty of repentance going on:

- The Jews of Jerusalem had to change their mind about Jesus being a blasphemer and instead trust in Him.
- The Samaritans had to change their mind about their syncretistic religion and turn to Jesus.
- Simon the sorcerer had to turn from the occult to Jesus.
- The Ethiopian Eunuch had to turn from his Ethiopian Gods and the ritual of Judaism and believe in Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.
- Cornelius had to change His mind about keeping the Mosaic Law and instead believe in Jesus.

Let me say this again, as clearly as I can—repentance is a natural part of placing one’s faith in Christ. For you cannot turn and place your faith in something in which you haven’t previously been trusting (Jesus), without a change of mind. You do not believe in a Savior that died for your sins without a realization (change of mind) that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.

There are many things that lost people need to turn from, but only one thing they need to turn to in order to be saved—the Lord Jesus Christ! And that’s the clear mandate of Scripture.



You see the mistake made by some is to add a lot of baggage to the term *repentance*, simply because they prefer lost people to stop sinning as part of becoming Christians. Although understandable, this is not scriptural.

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

1 Peter 2:1-3

Peter is writing to believers—those who have tasted the “grace of the Lord.” What does he tell them to do? To grow through the intake of the Word while setting aside the various manifestations of sin associated with the old life. This is the Biblical order—new life first and then transformation!

To require a lost and unregenerate people, without the Spirit of God and an understanding of the Word of God, to change their lives as a condition of salvation is a grievous error. That is, in reality, just another version of working for your salvation. The problem with this false gospel message is that we have put an obstacle to salvation before the unbeliever that even as Christians we still struggle to accomplish. When we observe that Jesus never put this obstacle before unbelievers, we should realize that something is wrong.

In this regard, I am reminded of the approach that mothers or grandmothers sometimes take with their children and grandchildren. They say with heartfelt compassion with respect to an unbelieving child or grandchild, "If so-and-so would only meet a nice boy (girl) and settle down." "If only they would stop doing. . . ." "If he (or she) would just lose ten pounds, change the kind of clothes they wear, get new friends." The list goes on and on.

But, if that child or grandchild is lost, what does he or she need more than anything else? To turn in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ! An unbeliever can settle down, lose ten pounds, change their clothing style, get a make over, and by any manner of activity change their stripes and still be just as lost as can be! In fact, the Bible reports that Judas repented, gave the money back, and acknowledged that Jesus was innocent. Despite his repentance, Judas died by suicide just as lost as lost can be. Why? Because he never turned to Jesus as Lord and Messiah! He never changed his mind about who Jesus was. He never put his faith in Him.

Let me emphasize again how a life is really transformed. First, you must turn to the Lord in faith, which requires you to turn from whatever it was you had been trusting in, banking on, relying on for happiness. As a new creation in Christ who has both the Word of God and the Spirit of God at your disposal, then, and only then, do you have the ability to be transformed.

Now, with the help of the Holy Spirit, you will start to recognize, hate, and forsake your sin, in all its manifestations!

Therefore I urge you brothers. . .to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. . .Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:1-2

Notice Paul is addressing believers (brothers), and not unbelievers. It is the believers who are told to offer their bodies as living sacrifices. Note how it is the believer, and not the unbeliever, who is told to stop conforming to the pattern of this world. And what is the desired goal, to be transformed by the renewal of your mind! How does this occur? We saw it clearly in I Peter 2:1-3, printed on the previous pages. We are transformed through the intake of the Word of God and the ministry of the Spirit of God.

As the passage goes on to make clear, this is how we conform to the will of God. It is essential that we understand this. You don't tell a lost person to change their ways and then get saved. You tell a lost person how to get saved through faith in Jesus Christ; and then, once they have been supernaturally regenerated, they have the new-life and the means to begin the life-long process of being conformed to the image of Christ! (Romans 8:29) For the Christian way of life is a supernatural life, and to call the unbeliever to live it prior to, or as part of salvation, has deviated greatly from the message proclaimed by Jesus and the message proclaimed by the early church. This is more than enough reason to reject this dual requirement for salvation as false.



Perhaps you think I am being a little bit dogmatic about this. Consider the words on the next page from Theologian Dr. Harry A. Ironside, which perhaps even more strongly summarize exactly the point I have been trying to make.

The Gospel is not a call to repentance, or to amendment of our ways, to make restitution for past sins, or to promise to do better in the future. These things are proper in their place, but they do not constitute the Gospel; for the Gospel is not good advice to be obeyed, it is good news to be believed. Do not make the mistake then of thinking that the Gospel is a call to duty or a call to reformation, a call to better your condition, to behave yourself in a more perfect way than you have been doing in the past ... Nor is the Gospel a demand that you give up the world, that you give up your sins, that you break off bad habits, and try to cultivate good ones. You may do all these things, and yet never believe the Gospel and consequently never be saved at all. (H. A. Ironside)

There are two things to note regarding this quote:

- When Dr. Ironside says the Gospel is not a “call to repentance,” he is referring to the distorted view of repentance that we have already discussed.
- The point I have been trying to make is not proved via a statement made by Dr. Ironside. It is proved by the clear statements of Scripture I have already shown you.

I print his quote simply to show you, as will become clear in the next few pages, that well known Bible teachers disagree on this issue. The bottom line, however, is that it does not matter what man has to say, but “What sayeth the Lord.”

The message is that we must never ask a lost person to do something that is ultimately impossible for them to do. We must never ask them to do something that might distract them from what it is that actually can save them. So, how do you come? You turn to Christ and place your faith in Him! (John 3:16, Acts 11:17)

And that’s good news!

The Centurion Cornelius

The narrative of Acts, Chapter 10 begins with the perspective of Cornelius. First, he is a Roman soldier, stationed in Caesarea. The name Cornelius is a common Roman name, and being part of the Italian Regiment, it is reasonable to assume that he is a Roman. As a centurion, he leads a group of 100 soldiers that make up part of a legion of approximately 6000 men.

One afternoon he receives a visit from an angel who gives him instructions to send to Joppa for Peter. Note that in Acts 10:6 it is recorded that Peter will tell Cornelius “*what to do.*” This is made even more specific in Acts 11:14 where it is recorded that Peter would communicate to Cornelius, his family and friends:

*...words by which you and all your household
will be saved.*

This is one of a number of things that make it clear that Cornelius, and his household, are in need of salvation.

First Point of Application

Now I want you to note carefully the description of this Roman soldier found in Acts 10:2. He was *devout, feared God, gave alms* to the poor, and *prayed to God always*. By almost any moral measure, this man is an outstanding individual. Here is our first point of application: You can be devout, do good deeds, pray. . . and be lost. I am thinking of how important it is in America, where we have such a strong Christian heritage, to realize our religious affiliation can't save us, our sincere efforts at doing good can't save us, and not even our prayers can save us. Like Cornelius, we need to come face to face with the truth that God has just one way for us to be reconciled to Himself and that is through the person and work of His Son. Don't trust in yourself and your religious efforts, transfer your trust to the One who can truly save.

Second Point of Application

As a second point of application, Peter has a real problem on his hands. How well do you think communicating the message, “Cornelius, you need to forsake your sin!” is going to help Cornelius come to salvation? In fact, you and I face exactly this same problem when the Lord puts on our heart friends and neighbors with whom He wants us to share the Gospel, and we realize that they are *better* and *nicer* people than we are! What do we do then?



Fortunately, we have already covered the truth that Biblical repentance, as it relates to a lost person, isn't really about forsaking your personal sins, it is about changing your mind about your need of a Savior. It is about realizing that Jesus Christ is that Savior! This is the real message that Peter needs to give to Cornelius, and notice how much more Scriptural is the following:

Cornelius, you need to change your mind about working for your salvation by keeping the Mosaic Law, and instead turn in belief to the Savior who died for your sin.

It is His great mercy that is able to save you.

(See Romans 4:3-5, Titus 3:4-5)

I particularly want you to note this passage in Romans:

Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. . .

Romans 4:3-6

It was exactly the same 2000 years ago as it is today, when you work for someone, they owe you wages. There are many people who think that their religious association and activity has put God under obligation. In other words, He owes them something. This passage refutes that position, as does the fact that the devout Cornelius still needed to be saved.

How then can a person be saved? Abraham was considered righteous for one reason, he believed God. So too any man or woman who does not work for their salvation, but *believes on Him who justifies the ungodly* (see Romans 3:21-24), his or her faith will also be counted for righteousness. This is the crossroads at which Cornelius finds himself. Although he is a good man, attempting to keep the Mosaic Law as a way to be righteous in God's sight, he needs to change his mind about the way to be justified in God's eyes and trust in Christ.

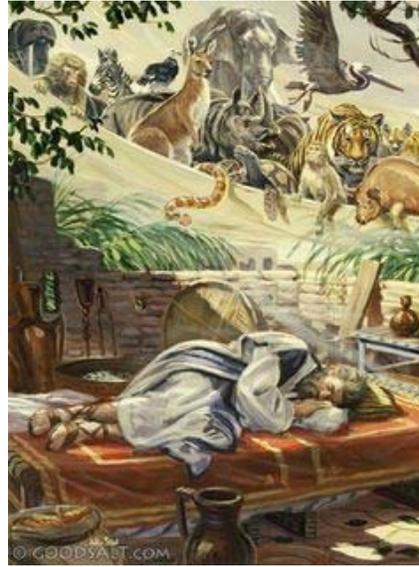
For Cornelius needed to learn the same lesson we do:

...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. . . through Jesus Christ our Savior. . . Titus 3:4-6

Third Point of Application

As continue with the narrative in Acts 10:9, we see things from Peter's perspective. We find Peter both in prayer and hungry. These next few verses remind me how easily God can simply reach into our lives and teach us. Just look at how He uses circumstances: the men sent by Cornelius have almost arrived, Peter is hungry, and Peter is in prayer. God uses all of this as a teachable moment to give Peter the truth about spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles. God is not an uninterested observer, but desires to be actively at work in our lives as He uses us to accomplish His purposes and bring glory to Himself.

Making use of Peter's hunger, God brings a vision to Peter of all kinds of animals, including those considered unclean under the Mosaic Law. Then God commands Peter to "rise, kill, and eat." Peter's terse answer: "Not so, Lord!" As another point of application, Peter's heartfelt response is very helpful in drawing attention to another area of erroneous teaching that is very prevalent in our day. It is not often that you will be able to refute an entire false doctrine with just two words from the Bible, but this is an example.



Notice that, in essence, Peter says: “No, Lord!” It is not really possible for these two words to go together is it? For if you call Jesus Lord, then the only possible response to a request from him is, “Yes, Lord!” What we have is a very clear example of a time in Peter’s life when he is not in submission to Christ. God tells him what to do, and he says, “No!”

How well does this coincide with another false gospel message out there that goes something like this: in order to be saved, you have to completely submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and believe in Him. If you don’t completely submit, you are not really saved. In fact, this false teaching goes so far as to teach that, if you have later struggles with sin, that is with the Lordship of Christ in your life, it proves you were never *really* saved. This false doctrine is often summed up by the catchy phrase: If Jesus is not Lord of all; then He is not really Lord at all.

You can clearly see this type of teaching in the following statements by a well-know Bible teacher, John F. MacArthur, in a book he has written on the Gospel:

Saving faith is "unconditional surrender, a complete resignation of self and absolute submission," as well as, "Saving faith is a commitment to leave sin and follow Jesus Christ at all costs. Jesus takes no one unwilling to come on those terms."

One particular reason to bring statements such as these to your attention is so that you are able to see the close connection between misrepresenting repentance and misrepresenting the Gospel. Both are evident in the above quotes. In addition, the definition of “saving faith” given above is in no way related to the words translated as “believe” no less than 99 times in the Gospel of John. It is another example of adding theological baggage to the otherwise clear meaning of a word.

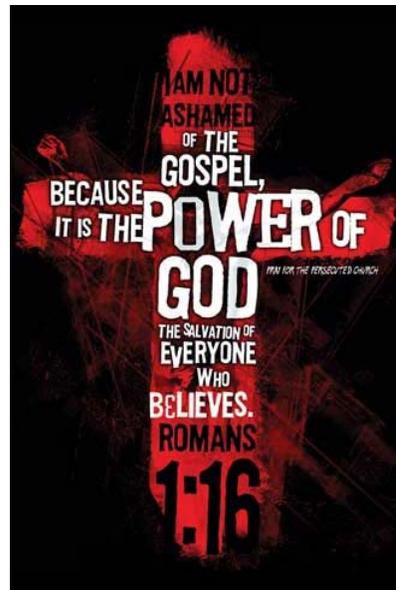
If we were to rigorously apply this false teaching to Peter's answer, we would have to conclude that he is not really saved! That's nonsense, isn't it? For, if your theology teaches a way of Salvation that post-Pentecost Peter can not meet, something is wrong with your theology. It would be a grievous thing to place this type of error before an unbeliever as a condition of salvation.

What the Bible Teaches

Let me lay out what the Bible really teaches, and I know you will immediately realize our experience reinforces this truth. The only area to which an unbeliever can truly submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is associated with becoming a child of God.

Here we are, living our lives as blessed Americans, thinking our Christian heritage and religious affiliation is going to save us and all of a sudden God brings the Gospel into our lives. God's Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit allow us to see ourselves as we really are, sinners in need of a Savior. We learn from the Word of God that faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ is the way that God has provided for us to be reconciled to Him. This is the only

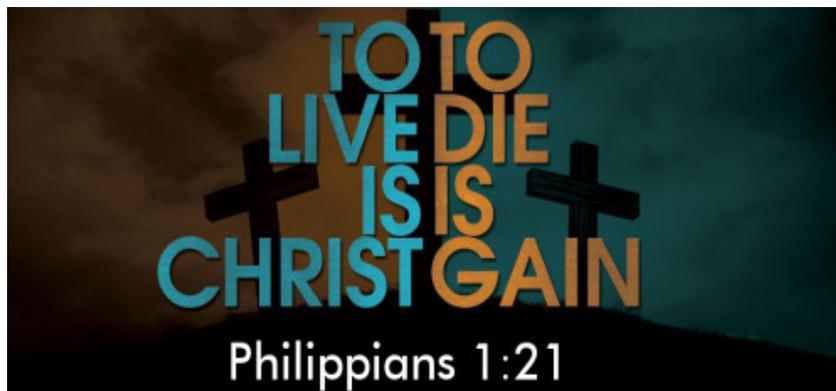
way by which we can be saved on the authority of God's word! For those who believe shall not perish, while those who do not believe will remain in the condition in which they started—condemned! (John 3:18,36)



The one and only question of Lordship for every lost person is: Will you submit to the Lordship of Christ by turning from your vain manner of life and turning to Him and placing your faith in Him, and Him alone. Asking a spiritually dead person to submit any more broadly than this is spiritual folly of the worst kind.

Now if this lost person believes, then what? He or she is intended by God to spend the rest of his or her life submitting in one area after another to the Lordship of Christ. That's what being His disciple is all about. As we grow, our time, talents, resources, and will are all meant to come under the Lordship of Christ, until we too can say:

For to me, to live is Christ. . . Philippians 1:21



That is exactly what is going on in the life of Peter. He has had so many lessons on submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and this is just one more. Back in our text, note how Peter eventually comes around, although the Lord has to repeat the lesson three times in order for Peter to *get it*. But he eventually does, and he shows his submission and spiritual understanding in Acts 10:28:

*God has shown me that I should not call
any man common or unclean.*

Why does the Lordship of Christ, correctly understood, work this way? Because it is not until a person is a new creature in Christ that he or she has the ability to submit, through the Word of God and the Spirit of God, just as Peter did.

If we read Acts 10 beginning in Verse 23, we see that once Peter understands this new area in which the Lord is asking him to obey, he does so with his typical zeal. Not only does he invite these Gentile servants of Cornelius into the home at which he is staying, he lodges them for the night and promptly goes with them the next day.

After the two-day journey to Caesarea, Peter finds Cornelius, his entire family, and his close friends all gathered to hear the message by which they can be saved. Cornelius repeats the story of his vision, and then Peter starts to speak. He continues to show his spiritual perception with respect to the lesson God taught him just two days ago by proclaiming:

*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.
But in every nation. . . Acts 10:34*

From this beginning, Peter launches into a great message to an entirely Gentile audience. Now don't be misled by Verse 35 which talks about God's acceptance for those who fear Him and do good. This is exactly the status of Cornelius. A fact which has led some to incorrectly assume that Cornelius was saved before Peter's arrival and just needed the outpouring of the Spirit. I believe what this is actually teaching us is that the positive nature of Cornelius's response to the revelation he had, limited in nature as it was, is the reason behind God moving to bring the proclamation of the Gospel into his life through Peter. Cornelius was ready to hear and respond to the Gospel

As the narrative continues, we can summarize it by saying that Peter preached Jesus to Cornelius and his family. He closes his message in Verse 43:

*To Him (Jesus Christ) all the prophets witness that,
through His name, whoever believes in Him
will receive remission of sins.*

An amazing thing happens in Verse 44, but before we get there, consider the following:

- Does Peter tell Cornelius to feel bad about his sins and to stop doing them? No! You find no such thing anywhere in the text!
- On the other hand, does Cornelius have a sin problem? Of course he does! Every member of the human race is born with a sin problem, and that's why Peter ends his message with the fact that through faith in Christ there is remission of sins.

Now note Acts 10:44. As Peter closes his message, while the words are still coming from his mouth, the Holy Spirit fell on those who heard the Word. The Holy Spirit fell upon them because they had responded in faith to the Gospel message, they had placed their faith in Christ! Those who had accompanied Peter were absolutely shocked, for they never thought the Spirit would be poured out on Gentiles, let alone hated Roman Gentiles!



I want you to note very carefully Peter's assessment of the situation in Acts 11:17: We believed and received the Spirit—they believed and received the Spirit. In short, the household of Cornelius heard the Gospel, they believed on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and they were saved and received the Holy Spirit immediately upon that exercise of faith.

Notice, in contrast to our previous lessons, how things are progressing with the spreading of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit is now received at the time of faith and apart from the laying on of hands by an Apostle, exactly as it is today. As Peter recognizes what has happened, he is quick to baptize those who have believed. And so, this group of Gentiles publicly identifies their faith in Jesus Christ. And by baptizing these Gentiles without even a moment's hesitation. We once again see that when Peter gets it, he really gets it!

As we move into Acts, Chapter 11, we will be reminded of the fact that whenever you find God at work, you can expect opposition to be close at hand. Where will the opposition come from? Based upon our previous experience in the book of Acts, we already know it is most likely to come from within the church. Sure enough, that's exactly what happens. When Peter gets back to Jerusalem he is *called on the carpet* by the Jewish Christians who want to keep the faith exclusive to Jewish converts.

Peter tells the whole story, from both his perspective and that of Cornelius. Then he sums it up perfectly in Verse 17. The answer to the question How do you come? is "***believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.***"

That's how Peter and the Apostles came, that's how the early Jewish converts came, and it is now how Gentiles have come. As I stated earlier, if we look at Jew, Gentile, or anything in between, there are many things you can turn from, but the only thing you can turn to is Jesus!

Now let's take a closer look at Acts 11:18. For it describes the response of the Church in Jerusalem after hearing the whole story from Peter.

*When they heard these things they became silent;
and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also
granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."*

They heard the full story, they thought it over, they correctly realized what God was doing, and they gave Him the glory. Now as I mentioned earlier, the second error promulgated with respect to repentance is that in order to turn to Christ and believe upon Him, God has to give you the repentance to do so—and this is the verse commonly used to support such a claim. Specifically, they point to:

"...God has granted... repentance..." Acts 11:18

From this verse, some have built an entire doctrine that God has to reach into the lives of the lost and change their mind for them, and, of course, as previously discussed, cause them to hate their sin and turn from it. The lost must do all this while they are still unbelievers. An interesting theory, but what does the Bible have to say?



Consider the Context

The first thing to note is that this position completely violates the context. I can understand their thinking if all you had to go by is Verse 18, but it is a very important point of interpretation that a verse without a context is a pretext. By that we mean you can make a Bible verse say anything you want it to, if you take it out of context. By now you are familiar with the context, and what do you think is the meaning of this verse?

This whole section is about the Jews accepting the fact that God is saving Gentiles, and not only that, blessing them with the same filling of the Spirit that marked the start of the Church back at Pentecost in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders of the Christian Church in Jerusalem are in absolute shock over this. In essence, what they are coming to grips with in Verse 18 is that even Gentiles can be saved through faith! And once understanding the context, you won't be at all surprised to learn that the Greek word translated *granted* in Verse 18 has a large range of meanings including *to extend*.

What the Jews are really proclaiming, in a state of shocked surprise, is that God has *extended* to the Gentiles the very same salvation, right down to the receipt of the Spirit, that He has given to the Jews. Do you know what most of the rest of the book of Acts is about from this point forward? It is about the spread of salvation through the proclamation of the Gospel to Gentiles. Do you know what is the history of the Church? The very same thing, people, mostly Gentiles, turning to faith in Christ and becoming part of the family of God.

Let's continue to think through this issue of repentance and its source. Is turning and believing in Christ, within the context of Biblical narrative, most often portrayed as something you can't do, or something God is calling you to do? Does the Holy Spirit convict us (John 16:8) because we can't believe or because we can choose to believe?

God has made us in His image and likeness, and part of that creative act is to make us such that we can choose to believe, even in our fallen state. That is why the Bible doesn't teach that God has to reach in and change your mind. Rather, He brings the truth to light, that we might come to a change of mind about how to be saved.

Can you see that this is exactly what happened in the life of Cornelius? Cornelius changed his mind about keeping the Law as a means of salvation, and turned in faith to Jesus Christ. Is there anything at all in the text to indicate that God did that for him? Or, do we simply have a group of family and friends who were ready to hear the truth via a clear Gospel message, and, in receiving that truth, turned to God and believed?

God initiated this whole chain of events. He drew Cornelius and his family, He convicted them of their need, but He didn't change their mind for them and He didn't believe for them. God is calling us to respond, instead of saying, "If I don't respond for you, than you are just out of luck!"

The more you think this through, the more you will realize that, throughout the Scriptures, the Gospel presents the truth that all a person needs to do is to turn to Christ and place his or her faith in Him to be saved. The Gospel is proclaimed as an appeal to the lost to be saved.

The Gospel is an appeal to change your mind about who God is and how you might come into right standing with Him. Let me show you this directly from a collection of Scriptures. You, in turn, be careful to check the contexts of each of these Scriptures:

*... as ambassadors for Christ. . .we implore you on
Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.
II Corinthians 5:20*

Do you see how firmly Paul understands his role as an ambassador communicating a message? In communicating his message he “implores” his audience—why? Because He wants them to respond! Be sure to notice that he does not implore God to respond for them.

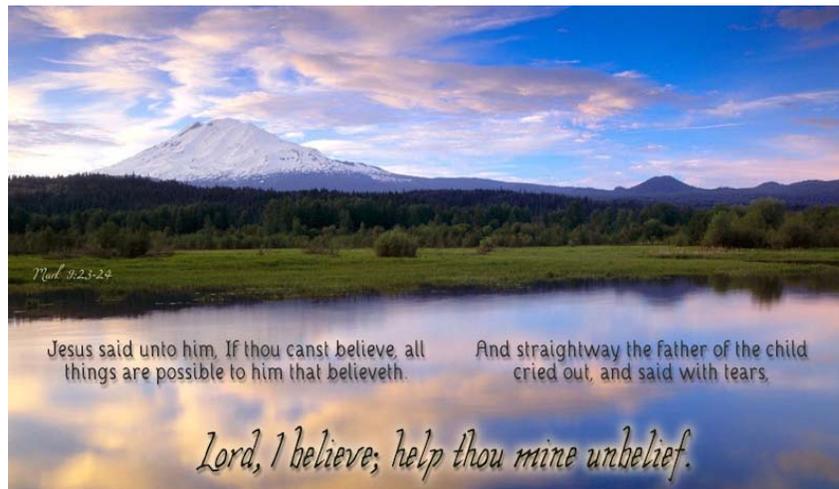
Now, consider Acts 26:27-28

*King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets—
I know you do believe. . . Then Agrippa said to Paul,
“Do you think you can persuade me in such a short time
to become a Christian?”*

Notice the work of persuasion as Paul proclaims the Gospel to King Agrippa. In this case, Agrippa resists the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, but the message is clear.

Then, consider this excerpt from Mark 9 where a man comes to Christ to seek healing for his child:

If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes. . . Immediately the Father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”
Mark 9:23-34



Those who teach that repentance is a work of God, typically also teach that faith is a *gift* from God as well. But look at how the Bible actually portrays both of these. Jesus says to this desperate man, who is most likely an unbeliever, “*If you believe. . .*”.

Jesus actually interacts with the man in a way that challenges him to recognize who He really is and to trust in Him. The whole dialog is premised upon the fact that the man can, in fact, believe. And how does the man respond? He comes questioning if it is possible for Jesus to do anything at all. Then, after a brief dialog with Jesus, he changes his mind and forcefully expresses his repentance (change of mind) through faith in Jesus. He goes on to express the challenge faced by every born-again child of God, to perpetuate the faith with which we began the Christian life across as many days as the Lord gives us.

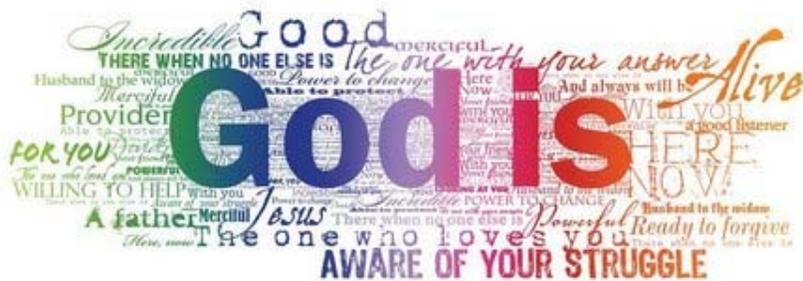
Heed the Call

This dialog in Mark 9 illustrates the call to every lost person on planet earth right now. Jesus is calling all mankind to the cross, that we would change our mind about our need, change our mind about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Then He can take care of not only our eternal destination but deliverance from every bondage in our life, one bondage at a time.

Do you see how different is this Biblical understanding from one that says, unless God does the repenting and believing for you, you have no hope? Much closer to the truth is the following: Jesus Christ has done all of the work necessary to save you, yours is to receive this gift through faith. Therefore, there is great reason to have hope! This is our Gospel message—praise God!

When I see the scope of what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ, when I clearly realize that God is asking us to come to Him through nothing more than turning to Christ and trusting Him for forgiveness of sins and receipt of eternal life, I stand in awe and I am so greatly encouraged. For we have the greatest message the world has ever known. Let's spread the message of the Gospel, a message that is true to the Word of God, everywhere we can. We have a Father who draws and initiates our coming to Him. We have a Son who, through the means of the cross, draws all men to Himself as the central figure in all of human history. We have a Holy Spirit who convicts the heart. And, we have the Word of God that is alive and powerful!

Oh, that we would choose to be His witnesses, His ambassadors, with the expectation that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life, That's the who! Now, how to come? Turn from every false hope, religion, good deeds, devout behavior, prayer, and turn, in faith, to the Lord Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of His work on the cross. There is no work of reforming ourselves first. We need only trust in the finished work of our Savior. For there are many things we can turn from, but only one person we can turn toward and upon whom our faith must rest! And all God's people said, Amen!



VISTOSO
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He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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