

Stop Trying to Get Saved

BY GREG ALBRECHT

Are you saved, brother?" the earnest young man asked me. He continued, "If you're not saved, you need to get saved." I responded to him, "Before I reply, may I ask you what it is you believe I need to be saved from?" The young man didn't miss a beat (as I suspected he wouldn't) and immediately rattled off the stock answer he'd been taught.

The young evangelist wanted me to *get* saved so *he could save* another soul from the eternal torment of the fires of hell. He told me I needed to get saved from my sins so I would not go to hell. So I asked, "Let me get this straight. I need to *get* saved from my sins so I won't go to hell?" "Exactly," he said.

Locking eyes with him, I evangelized the young evangelist. "So, it seems to me that you believe the primary reason I need to *get* saved is to avoid the pain and anguish of eternal torment. Further, if I get what you're saying and why you're saying it, if I *get* saved, you will have saved me from eternal torture in hell. It seems to me that your definition of *getting* saved is all about what you and I do, or fail to do."

I then explained what I was given when I *received* the grace God so generously provides: "*Jesus saved me from* the self-righteousness, arrogance and legalistic religion that once

enslaved me so that he could live in me and transform me into who and what he wants me to be. He rescued me *from* the clutches of performance-based religion so that I can be free—free in Christ both now and forever. Nothing I did saved me. I

presumes to take any spiritual credit whatsoever for any actions of behaviors, we are more likely to be in a relationship with religion than we are in a relationship with our loving God—a relationship that I define as by *faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone.*"

Separation and Reconciliation

After my conversation with the impassioned, fervent young man was over I continued to think about this term *getting saved*.

I realize I have two major problems with the phrase "*getting saved*"—1) "*Getting*" is antithetical to the gospel. We are given God's grace and love. 2) "*Saved*" is a biblical word, but in much of Christendom it has come to mean being saved from our sins. However, the biblical usage is much more than being saved from sin. In fact, the Bible often uses the word "*saved*" or "*salvation*" when the context has nothing to do with sin. "*Saved*" and "*salvation*" are primarily used by the Bible to describe being set free from slavery, either physically or spiritually, or both.

Perhaps "*reconciled*" is a better and more accurate term than "*saved*." In Colossians 1:20 we read that God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself through Jesus Christ. Reconciliation is a relational term. It has to do with a restored and repaired

relationship. Spiritual reconciliation is a gift. We cannot find any New Testament passage which would lead us to think that we can get saved by something we can do, effect, earn or perform. *Getting saved* is not biblical terminology—nor is it terminology used by the vast majority of



didn't *get* saved. Rather, I *accepted* what Jesus has already done for me. I *received* God's love, and it is because of his love that he saved me—not by my works but by his grace."

Further, I said, "*speaking of getting saved* can lead us away from the grace of God. When we or our religion

Christians, dead in Christ or physically alive today. If and when we receive Christ Jesus as Lord (Colossians 2:6) we can *be saved*—but we cannot *get saved*.

Reconciliation describes the cessation of hostilities, differences

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and grievances. Peace was declared when God in Christ ended any and all alienation, through the monumental, once-and-for-all demonstration of his love on the cross. Peace was declared! Reconciliation was offered. Of course, on the part of humanity, God's declaration of peace did not generate a cease-fire!

In terms of human relationships we often use the word "reconciliation" to describe two partners in a marriage who were separated or divorced, but now, having come back together they are said to have reconciled. Human reconciliation involves two parties who are both willing to admit they were, to one degree or another, at fault. In order for human reconciliation to take place both parties must compromise and change so that reconciliation can result. Both parties normally deserve some credit in a human reconciliation. In terms of any separation we have with God, the fault is entirely on our side. And, all of the work of bringing us back together is accomplished by God—none of it is to our credit.

In his classic parable of the prodigal

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son (Luke 15), Jesus depicts an all-too-true human familial separation as a way of illustrating God's offer of divine reconciliation: A rebellious son runs away from home, taking a large chunk of the assets of the family, with the intention of never seeing his family again. He disgraces the family name, squanders all his money and makes a huge mess out of his life. The son was reconciled, wasn't he? But did

he *get* reconciled, or was he reconciled by his father?

The son didn't feel worthy to be reconciled as a son, but he thought that he might be able to pay off his debt by working as a hired hand (Luke 15:19). The prodigal son first

thought that he could *get* reconciled as a consequence of his hard work.

But the father had another plan of reconciliation in mind. While the father did not force his son to return home, once the son made the decision to come home his father

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welcomed him back, reconciling and restoring him without any strings attached (all of which made the legalistic, justice-by-the-book older brother extremely upset!)

Who Makes Reconciliation Happen?

The gift of God's reconciliation does not come without a cost, but the cost is not at all borne or paid by us. The cost is entirely borne by God the Son, Jesus Christ. In Christ, God reconciled all things—all mankind—for that matter the entire universe. But reconciliation is not fully activated and complete until the recipient accepts the gift. No eager,

zealous evangelist can save us! The whole world is reconciled, but the decision about coming home and accepting the peace our heavenly Father offers is left to each and every prodigal son and daughter.

The New Testament uses other words and terms to speak of the reconciliation and peace we may enjoy with God, by his grace. This relational gift of God is also described

as conversion, transformation, and new birth. Those terms identify God as the mover and shaker behind our salvation, far more accurately than the misleading phrase *getting saved* does.

Reconciliation is something God alone does—not something we do or something to which we materially contribute. Our role in reconciliation is to decide to accept or reject what God in Christ has done and the relationship he invites us to enjoy with him. If and when we accept God's offer of reconciliation, we are saved *from* who and what we were and are, apart from Christ, *for* eternal life in relationship with God. We're reconciled. Scripture speaks of us *being* saved, and that's where the emphasis lies. The Biblical emphasis

is not on us *getting saved*. *Getting saved* leads us into the grips of legalistic religion.

Receiving—Not Achieving!

Our reconciliation with God is not a favorable status we initiate—it's not a relationship we acquire or achieve. It's a relationship we're given by God's grace. We cannot presume to know God on the basis of our efforts, for we have no ability to pay the price. Salvation, according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, is a gift of God. It is *given* to us.

While performance-based religion may admit that God has some part in giving us salvation, it often explains salvation as a transaction, a business deal whereby God does his part and we do our part.

Christ-less religion thus believes it is appropriate to speak of salvation as something we *get*—something we achieve—something we acquire—something we earn. And thus Christ-less religion explains salvation as something we should work for, as if it depended on us, and pray for, as if it depended on God. *As if* it depended on God. *As if?*

Colossians 1:12 says that the Father has qualified us for the kingdom of light. We don't *get* saved in terms of something we say or

do—we *are* saved in terms of what God does. We don't qualify for salvation—God qualifies us.

We *are* saved, according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that he might transform us. We *are* saved and reconciled, according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, *from* the life we lead in this flesh apart from Christ, so that Christ may eternally live in us. We are saved *for* the life of Christ. But according to the nomenclature and terminology favored by Christ-less religion, we *get saved* from eternal torture in hell to which God will consign/subject us unless we do everything religion tells us to do. *Getting saved* carries the idea of a continuing task on our part to insure that we keep an uncertain, unpredictable god happy so he won't change his mind and condemn us to eternal torture.

Being reconciled and saved is explained by the gospel as our acceptance of the peace of God and the indwelling life of our risen Lord, given to us freely, without strings attached. The gospel of Jesus Christ explains that being reconciled and saved is about the work of Christ as both an initial action and an ongoing transformation. The spurious idea behind *getting saved* is that once we *get it*, then we need to *keep doing* religious stuff to make sure we keep it and hang onto it.

Five Facets of Christ-Centered Reconciliation

Consider these five facets of Christ-centered, biblically-based reconciliation and salvation:

1) Jesus Christ has done all that is necessary for our salvation on his cross. Whether all individuals in the world realize it or like it, the entire world is now saved. Peace has been declared and it is now actively offered, on God's terms and in his time.

2) While all that is necessary for

our salvation has been accomplished, salvation and reconciliation is not automatic. God does not confer salvation upon anyone without their consent. Some religious professionals would have us think our reconciliation with God is similar to an arranged or even forced marriage. The emphasis and motivation in *getting saved* is placed on escaping

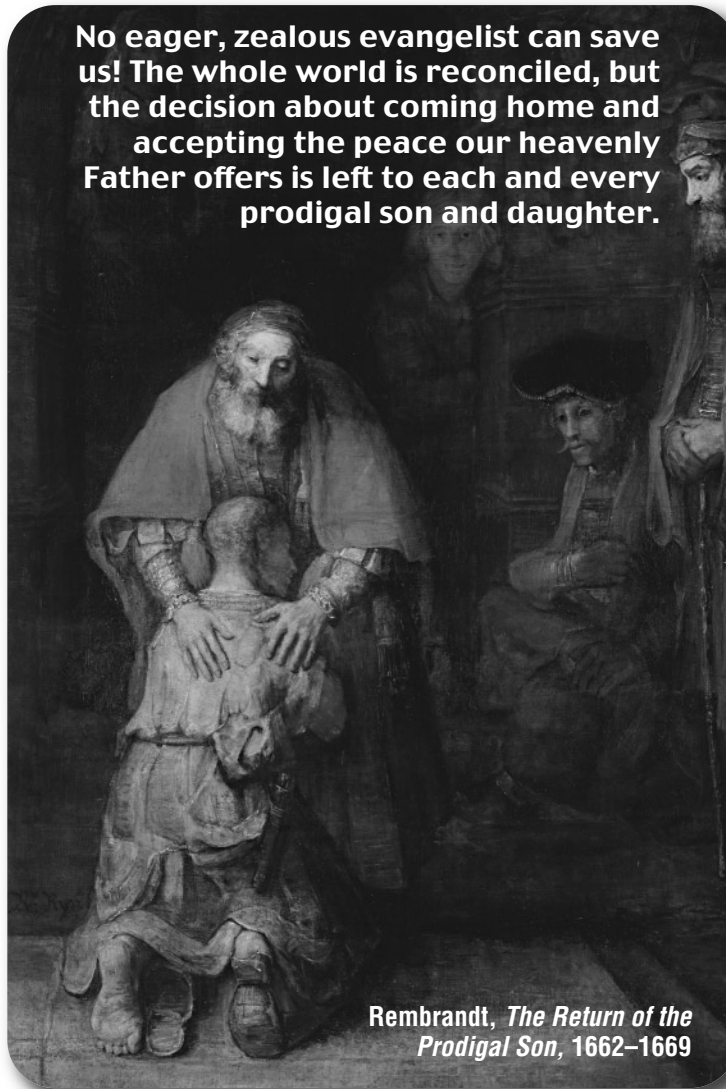
us specific details as to how God invites individuals to receive salvation, but it categorically states that no human is naturally inclined toward accepting God's gracious gift. Therefore, even the desire to consider accepting God's invitation, and then the decision to do so, must be primarily attributed to God's grace rather than human initiative. I believe

that God, in his mercy, love and grace, makes himself known to people, in a compelling way, as and when he determines that time and way to be best.

4) When and if we decide to accept God's gracious invitation we give God the credit due to him alone when we say we have *accepted or received* God's grace. When we believe we can *get saved* our language diminishes and devalues the righteousness of Jesus Christ as being sufficient to save us. Part of being saved and reconciled involves surrendering our attempts to *get saved* via human attempts.

5) Reconciliation/salvation is both an initial *act* as well as a *process*. It's an *act* in that we are either spiritually re-born and transformed, or we are not. We are either alive in Christ, by God's grace, or we are not. And, reconciliation/salvation is an evolving growth *process* whereby we are transformed on a daily basis by the Master Potter into what he wants us to be.

In 2 Peter 3:18 Peter speaks of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Spiritual growth and maturity in Christ is continuing reconciliation, a product of the life Christ lives within us. It's a process of continually moving away from the darkness of fear, shame and guilt into the glorious light of freedom in Christ. This ongoing transformation means that we live a life more and more open to Christ. It's a process which leads us to a deeper trust and faith in him, a process which deepens our



Rembrandt, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 1662–1669

eternal torment, to which we would otherwise be subjected. but the gospel insists that God pursues and courts us, and that we can accept his offer or reject it! Reconciliation has been completed and announced, but until individuals accept and receive salvation that relationship remains but an open invitation.

3) How every individual becomes aware of God's invitation and how many come to be positively inclined towards receiving his free gift is not entirely clear. The Bible does not give

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behavior. It’s all by his grace, it’s all because of Christ—*faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone.*

There was a moment in time when, as Colossians 1:20 says, through Jesus

love for him, and thus we are continually being converted, changed and transformed. We are growing up spiritually into Christ, so that as Paul says in Ephesians 4:14 we’re no longer spiritual infants, but rather children of God who are growing up into him who is the head, even Christ.

Getting Saved Distorts Our Relationship With God

The idea of *getting saved* falls short of the harmonious relationship we enjoy with God by his grace. We grow in our relationship with God through Christ. We mature as the risen Lord lives his life in us. We don’t grow and mature, and thus achieve and deserve and *get* a deeper spiritual relationship with God on the basis of what we do. We grow in Christ because of the matchless grace of God and his all encompassing love. We receive an ever-deepening love relationship with God which we can never deserve.

So once again, the term *getting saved* leads us to misunderstand the relationship God offers—it distorts the relationship we are offered by God. In another passage which describes our ongoing, maturing transformation from who we were to who we are, Jesus speaks of us as his sheep. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know

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indicate that the responsibility for remaining and staying saved is ours either.

We neither *get* saved nor do we maintain our salvation. We don’t

God loves the entire world. He loves each and every one of us, however unlovable we may seem to be, either to ourselves or to others. He loves each of us whether we like it or not! He made everything — things we see and things we don’t — and pronounced it all very good.

Christ God reconciled “to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Then, in ways completely and absolutely known to God alone, he communicates an invitation to his peace, in his time and in his way, to humanity at large. He draws humanity toward his open arms so that human reception and acceptance of his gracious offer is aided and abetted by his grace.

When God’s invitation to accept the reconciliation which has already been accomplished is accepted by us, we then become God’s work in progress. By his grace we become “God’s handiwork” (Ephesians 2:10). 2 Corinthians 4:16 notes the ironic wasting away of our temporary physical life flesh even while our spiritual life is maturing, by God’s grace: “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”

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In the last chapters of Revelation we read about God transforming and converting all things, the entire universe. The new heaven and new earth doesn’t *get saved* and reconciled, it is transformed by his grace. Out of his love God will transform our physical world into the new heavens and new earth and, as Revelation says, the former things are passed away.

So you see my friends, we don’t *get* saved. By God’s grace we have been and we are now being reconciled in Christ. □

them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). That passage tells us that we don’t initially *get* eternal life, nor does it

acquire or earn a relationship with God he would not otherwise give were it not for our spiritual hard work, nor do we ensure that we remain within God’s “good graces” on the basis of our good deeds and