

Chapter 2 The Doctrine of Salvation

It may be surprising to some to discover that the way in which many churches appeal to people to become Christians by having an "altar-call," is a practice that is relatively new to church history. The "altar-call" is usually extended following a sermon charged with volatile threats of eternal damnation. If a decision isn't made immediately to come forward and repent of one's sins and accept Jesus into his heart, he will be lost forever. This practice started about 100 years ago and was heavily condemned by many leading evangelists and scholars and with good cause. They feared it would change the understanding of our relationship to God and create in individuals the idea that a mediator is required to approach God. Reliance upon a preacher or evangelist to become "saved" creates the need to rely upon these same people to know God's word.

Catholicism had created a system that left the average person totally dependent on the priesthood for understanding or salvation. Protestantism claims not to have a priesthood but the result is the same when it is only the "clergy" that dictates doctrine and practice. Luther was condemned as a heretic for daring to declare this very fact. He defied the infallibility of the Pope and realized that the individual had been barred from approaching the throne of grace and appealing to God on his own behalf. The same is true of Protestants today when they willingly accept all that their Pastors and theologians tell them without doing their own research and study.

One of the most complete and thorough treatises I've ever read on the doctrine of salvation was written by Martin Luther and should be read by every Christian alive today. It is called, "The Bondage of the Will." When you understand what Luther was saying you will see why there is no justification for this practice of the "altar-call."

BUT let us see how Paul proves his sentiments out of the Holy Scriptures: and whether the passages which he adduces 'are made to have more force in Paul, than they have in their own places.' "As it is written, (saith he,) There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are all together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one," &c. (Rom. iii. 10-23).

Here let him that can, produce his 'convenient interpretation,' invent 'tropes,' and pretend that the words 'are ambiguous and obscure!' Let him that dares, defend "Free-will" against these damnable doctrines! Then I will at once give up all and recant, and will myself become a confessor and assessor of "Free-will." It is certain, that these words apply to all men: for the prophet introduces God, as looking down from heaven upon men and pronouncing this sentence upon them. So also Psalm xiv. 2-3. "God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek after God. But they are all gone out of the way," &c. And that the Jews might not imagine that this did not apply to them by anticipation, and asserts, that it applied to them most particularly: saying, "We know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law." (Rom. iii. 19). And his intention is the same, where he

saith, "To the Jew first and also to the Greek." From Martin Luther's "Bondage of the Will."

The argument for or against the "altar-call" boils down to one's concept of "Free-Will." Luther, John Calvin and many others of the Reformation held to the belief that man did not have a "Free-Will" to decide whether or not to follow Christ. Though many feel that such a concept insults their independence and autonomy, it's independence and autonomy that removes us from God's grace. Read Luther's reference again and you will find the verses he quotes from the book of Romans are emphatic and all inclusive. There is **none** righteous, **none** that seeketh after God and **none** that doeth good, no, not one. Jesus stated,

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will **draw** all men unto me. John 12:32

The word *draw* that is used in this verse means literally to **drag**. And prior to that He had said,

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me **draw** him:.... John 6:44

Again, the same word, **drag**.

The way in which the disciples became followers of Christ and the way in which Paul was converted are not atypical. Paul's conversion, which is given in the 9th chapter of Acts, was not the exception, it was the rule. If we were left to seek God before receiving His grace, none of us would be Christians.

The altar call is a vain idol, no matter whether it is used to call sinners to Christ or Christians to repent. It is a vain fashioning of the heart of man. Search the scriptures and see the warnings of God against those who trust in idols. Do not fool yourself by thinking that you are only showing your repentant spirit. If repentance is in your heart then scripture tells you how to show it. **Cease from your sinful behavior and if another is wronged go and make it right between you and do not turn aside from following the Lord and serve him with all your heart** (1 Sam 12:20). That is repentance, not kneeling at an imaginary altar. Do not suppose that we as Christians may invent rituals or ordinances as we see fit, that is the nature of false religion. The nature of true religion is to worship God as he commands and to live according to the teaching of scripture without innovation. Chad Van Rens

Chad van Rens, by his own admission, became a Christian simply by approaching God and accepting His mercy. He then learned the dispensational theology and became a member of an Independent Baptist church. As he grew and studied the Scriptures, he became convinced that dispensationalism was unscriptural and ultimately became a Calvinist and joined a reformed Presbyterian church. I mention this to illustrate that Mr. van Rens is doing exactly what every Christian needs to do. Study the word of God on your own and approach the Lord personally. I'm not a Calvinist but I think Mr. van Rens

is growing in Grace and is headed in the right direction. I believe there are gross errors in the TULIP concept of Calvinism but Presbyterians are Scripturally sound when they teach that "salvation" is a work of and by God alone.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was one of the most noted and popular preachers of all time. It is estimated that during his lifetime, he preached to over ten million people. He was born in 1834 in England and died in 1892. He traveled around England and Europe and China preaching and was the Pastor of the New Park Street Chapel for 38 years. He would sometimes preach as many as ten sermons a week. He lived long enough to see the beginnings of the practice of the, "altar-call," and he spoke out boldly against it.

The doctrine of justification itself, as preached by an Arminian, is nothing but the doctrine of salvation by works... -- C.H. Spurgeon

One of the biggest problems I have with the "altar call" is that it is most often used after an appeal is made to people to secure eternal life immediately or burn in hell for all eternity. Christ does not threaten people to accept Him. For the past century the Protestant churches have used this scare method to increase their numbers and the result today is that we now have mega-churches filled with people who have no understanding or spiritual discernment whatsoever. Hundreds of churches teach and stress success and wealth as the end result of being an obedient and "righteous" example to the world.

Responding in the manner described above is the same as God holding a gun to your head and threatening to kill you if you don't follow Him. Actually, that would be more merciful than what is taught about the eternal "lake of fire." More on "the lake of fire" in another chapter.

Teaching this doctrine of "free-will" is also incompatible with what Scripture says about the sovereignty of God. You either have "free-will" or God is sovereign, but they are mutually exclusive. You can't have it both ways. In Amos God says,

Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it? Amos 3:6

The Bible is filled with verses that declare, surmise and imply that God alone is sovereign. Once you become aware of this fact, the verses declaring it will leap from the pages as you read.

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.
Isa. 45:7

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them.....
Exo. 14:4

.....for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. Exo. 9:16
(Speaking of Pharaoh)

[18]Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. [19]Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find

fault? For who hath resisted his will?[20] Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? [21]Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? Rom. 9:18-21

There was a very popular evangelist in the 20th century that held crusades all across America and drew crowds in the thousands. He was also an advisor to Presidents and many famous people. At one of his meetings where thousands were in attendance, he had his usual “altar-call” at the close of his sermon and hundreds came forward. He then told all those in attendance not to pray for these people who had come forward because even God could not help them. He told the crowd that those who had come forward had to make the decision of following Christ of their own “free will.” Not only did he undermine the sovereignty of God but he stated something that goes completely against the teaching of Scripture. You do not choose God, He chooses you!

There are thousands, even millions, of people sitting in church pews across America that decided at some point in their lives to make a "decision" for Christ and it causes me to wonder just how secure they might or might not be. Judeo-Christians feel safe and secure and are convinced that they are going to heaven when they die but I can't help but ask, if you started out with a deception, how are you going to end up? How many of those people have constantly searched the word of God, prayed for understanding and are continually refining their beliefs and how many just go to church and listen to sermons on the joys of being a Christian? When I think of all the other misconceptions most Judeo-Christians believe, I'm thankful to God that I'm no longer of that persuasion.

Instead of believing what a minister or teacher says about Christianity, you should work out your own salvation with fear and trembling and study Scripture with the zeal and dedication of those in Berea. They were unwilling to even accept at face value what Paul taught them.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Acts 17:11

The Arminian and Dispensationalist schools, in their teachings on the doctrine of salvation, leave God virtually helpless and make His plan seem impotent and foolish at best. They do receive some consolation in the fact that God defeats some guy named Satan in the end, but in the process loses 95% of humanity. I don't call that a win. Nor can I even think of it as a plan that would be thought up by an all-powerful, all-loving God. Surely He could have come up with something better than that. Well, in fact, He did. Read on

Suggested reading, video and audio:

“Bondage of the Will” by Martin Luther

<http://www.amazon.com/Bondage-Will-R-Johnston/dp/0800753429?tag=dogpile-20>