

## **Beliefs Concerning Salvation**

- x God is leading Muslims to Jesus through dreams.
- x I can work my way to Heaven.
- x I think we're reincarnated to try and get it right the next time.
- x Deathbed confessions count with God.
- x You can never lose your salvation.
- x You can be saved one minute and lost the next.
- x Christians should "door-knock" in order to spread the Gospel.  
You must re-marry your former spouse before you can be saved.

## **God Is Leading Muslims To Jesus Through Dreams**

I sat in a Sunday school class one morning at a Nazarene church. There was a guest speaker, a missionary who had spent many years in Southwest Asia. He was fluent in conversational Arabic. He revealed to the class that many Muslims were having dreams about Christ, a clear sign that God was leading them to the Cross in this manner.

There are plenty of Christian missionaries in the Arab countries. There are also indigenous Christian evangelists living in these same countries, many of them risking their lives and the lives of their families to spread the Gospel.

Ask any Muslim if they know who Jesus is. They all know of Him. Trouble is, they don't believe in Him, not so much out of contempt but for fear of losing job, family, and friends. A Pakistani friend of ours posted an online letter stating that many Muslims are turning to atheism. Like the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greeks, the current generation of Arabs is disillusioned with Islam's emptiness and the connection with terrorists. (John 12:20-21)

When folks start pondering the questions of life, death, and eternity, they have dreams. The Arabic people are not materialistic, obsessed with "things" like the Western world. Priority is given to family. So as Christian missionaries travel through these countries, preaching Jesus, the indigents carry it home. They think. They ponder. They dream. The nagging issues of religion occupy their thoughts, so it's perfectly reasonable to assume that they would dream about Jesus. This Gospel ministry via dreams sent from God has been getting more and more traction among Christian pastors. The biggest issue is one of partiality—God doesn't favor one group or person over another. (Rom 2:11; Gal 2:6; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25)

Being somewhat superstitious, Arabs see dreams as portents of the future. If they dream of Jesus (thanks to hearing the Gospel) many perhaps see it as a sign to seek out the Christian faith. The Nazarene speaker mentioned told us that he had received many Arabs in this way. I do not doubt they dreamed of Jesus. God doesn't deliberately send dreams to Arabs, nor to anyone else. The reason can be found in the Bible.

God, who in various ways and in many ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by the Son. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

In "times past" God did use dreams, but in very specific circumstances to accomplish His will. He never caused entire nations to dream of His intentions. If so, Israel perhaps would not have spiraled down into depravity and idolatry as she did prior to the Babylonian captivity.

The writer of Hebrews clearly says, "in these last days (He has) spoken to us by the

Son.” To simplify things the “last days” refers to everything *after* Jesus' resurrection. How does God “speak” to us? Through His Son. How, exactly? Through the Bible. Jesus was the Word made flesh. (John 1:1ff) The Bible is a road map for humanity to figure out how to return to God and avoid His wrath.

Can God send dreams to people today? Of course, He can. Does He? If your preacher can't back it up with scripture, it's most likely bogus.

## **I Can Work My Way To Heaven**

Most people believe only “really bad people” are going to Hell. God’s standard for righteousness, however, is Jesus Christ, not what you and I think makes up being good or bad. Since we can’t be perfect like Jesus, we have to trust in Him to be our righteousness. (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21)

There are very few “Mother Teresas.” Let’s face it: most people could care less about the poor; they are more concerned with Self. They are not working their way to heaven by any stretch of the imagination. Our society believes that heaven is for anyone who is polite and avoids certain vices. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been married and divorced four or five times, or cheated on your taxes, or collected filthy jokes—a person can still get to heaven according to this philosophy. However, the Bible is clear on this subject:

Do not be deceived, God isn’t mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Gal 6:7-9)

Thinking that God will reward a person for being “good,” while ignoring all the sin in their life is a fool’s belief. If so, Christ’s died for nothing, and the blood He shed for all of our nasty little sins was a huge waste of time.

## **I Think We're Reincarnated To Try And Get It Right The Next Time**

Reincarnation, a belief born out of Eastern mysticism, promotes the idea that people are reborn and given another chance "to get it right." As a result, they believe, is that the world (or society) gradually improves. However, the world's moral decline is evidence that we are not "getting it right." Slaughter, hatred, and depravity get worse, while love, mercy, and truth are being crushed.

The other question that comes to mind is, why is it that *this* life—the one you're currently living—is so crystal clear while your "past" lives are not? The Bible is plain on this subject:

It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. (Heb 9:27)

There is no second, third, or subsequent life, death, and re-birth, but one physical death. Once you die, you will be judged, condemned for rejecting Christ, and be eternally separated from God. (John 5:24; Rev 19:20:11-14) Life over. No reset button.

Those who cling to the flimsy hope of reincarnation are headed towards a hopeless and dark eternity.

## **Deathbed Confessions/Conversions Count With God**

It is unfortunate that many see salvation on a prescriptive basis. In other words, by mumbling an “I’m sorry” prayer, we think God is obligated to save us, regardless of the misery we may have caused in our past. What we often forget is that God is not only a forgiving God, He is also a just God.

For example, folks believe that if Adolph Hitler had confessed his sins to Christ and accepted the Savior in his last moments, the notorious madman would have gone to heaven. While many would reject such a notion, many denominational preachers teach that anyone receiving Christ with their last dying breath is saved.

If the Thief on the Cross could wait until the last minute to get into heaven, why can't I? (Luke 24:39-43) This question is commonly asked by faith-only proponents. Their stance is that God is so big, so far above us, that salvation is strictly His prerogative. Anything regarding repentance and such is nothing to Him.

You are on a very slippery slope by waiting until the last minute. Most of us don't know when we'll die. The Bible warns us: “You do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” (James 4:14) I could list countless stories of folks who were caught suddenly by the Grim Reaper, never expecting to die.

“God is not mocked...a person will reap what they sow.” (Galatians 6:7) In other words, folks will get what they deserve. A person who spends their entire life doing evil and thumbing their nose at God is not going to suddenly get a reprieve just because Death is at their doorstep. The so-called Sinner's Prayer is unscriptural. Nowhere does the Bible teach that saying a little prayer will save a person. There are the issues of confession, repentance (turning around), and water baptism.

God can do what He wants within the parameters of His eternal grace and mercy. But one cannot live a lifetime of evil, thinking that God will whisk an Adolph Hitler into eternal bliss because some priest performed a ritual at the time of death, or he made the sign of the cross before succumbing to fate.

## You Can Never Lose Your Salvation

Called the “Once-Saved-Always-Saved” (OSAS) doctrine, this has historically been the most debated subject among Christian groups. When John Calvin came up with the idea of Divine Predestination—God chooses people to be saved and lost in spite of free will—he had to obviously conclude that salvation could never be lost, ever. Salvation, he claimed, was eternal.

To be technical, salvation is eternal—nothing can take it away from us. (Rom 8:38 – 39) There are many verses that contradict the OSAS belief. Yet a library full of books won't convince the adherents of their error. One such verse is found in Hebrews 10:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (Heb 10:26 - 27)

The writer is talking about saved individuals here, not unsaved sinners. “After receiving the knowledge of the truth” doesn't mean you hear a sermon, leave the church building, and then be forever lost because you didn't respond to the Good News. Note as the section continues:

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished *who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?* For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:28 – 31)

This is not talking about someone blowing off the Sunday morning invite, but of someone who actively went against God's gift. God didn't sacrifice His Son so that a person could thumb his nose at Him so they could go back to a life of sin.

Many denominational preachers are so enamored with Calvin's writings, that they cannot abandon them. Here are a few other verses that contradict the idea of never losing one's salvation:

You might say, “Branches were broken off so that I could be joined to their tree.” That is true. But those branches were broken off because they did not believe. And you continue to be part of the tree only because you believe. Don't be proud, but be afraid. If God did not let the natural branches of that tree stay, *he will not let you stay if you stop believing.* So you see that God is kind, but he can also be very strict. He punishes those who stop following him. But he is kind to you *if you continue trusting in his*

*kindness. If you don't continue depending on him, you will be cut off from the tree. (Romans 11:19-22)*

(God) has made you his friends again. He did this by the death Christ suffered while he was in his body. He did it so that he could present you to himself as people who are holy, blameless, and without anything that would make you guilty before him. *And that is what will happen if you continue to believe in the Good News you heard. You must remain strong and sure in your faith. You must not let anything cause you to give up the hope that became yours when you heard the Good News. (Col 1:22-23)*

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know what happened to our ancestors...God was not pleased with most of those people, so they were killed in the desert. And these things that happened are examples for us. These examples should stop us from wanting evil things as those people did. (1 Cor 10:1-6)

The things that happened to those people are examples. *They were written to be warnings for us.* We live in the time that all those past histories were pointing to. So anyone who thinks they are standing strong should be careful that they don't fall. (1 Cor 10:11-12)

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. (Hebrews 6:4-8)



## You Can Be Saved One Minute And Be Lost The Next

This legalistic belief is based on 1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The keyword is "if." *If* we confess, we're forgiven. The logic follows then if we *don't* confess, we are doomed. The minute we sin, we lose fellowship (are separated) from God until restored by confession and repentance of the wrong we did. A person who theoretically dies between those two points will be eternally lost. If we sin again five minutes later, the whole process repeats itself.

The problem with this line of thought is it allows no room for God's mercy. When you are saved, all of your sins—past and future—are forgiven:

He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time... (Heb 10:12)

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us *all our sins*. (Col 2:13)

The person who argued with me on this issue pointed out, "It still says if don't confess, we're not forgiven." But actually, the word *confess* literally means *to agree with*. In other words, if we don't agree with God that we have sinned, He's not going to forgive us. This is not speaking of individual sins but an attitude that can exist between you and God. "I'm no sinner, Lord!" In other words, I'm not in agreement with God on this issue.

Let's not forget about the sins of ignorance. Have you offended someone and didn't know it? What makes these unknown sins less severe than conscious ones? The former sin goes un-confessed while the latter is confessed. Note Paul's words:

I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted, but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts, and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (1 Cor 4:4-5)

God is greater than our heart. (1 John 3:19) There are things within us that are ugly, which we often try and cover up or rationalize. They are just as wrong as the most heinous sins. Simply going to church and feeling better about ourselves is not the answer—we have to confess our sins. Get down on our knees and humble ourselves before our Savior.

God's mercy and forgiveness aren't based on a scripted legalistic formula. The whole theme of Galatians is that we live by the Spirit, not by rules and regulations. Thank God for His great mercy and loving-kindness, so that we can rely on Him. We certainly cannot trust ourselves.

## **Christians Should “Door-Knock” In Order To Spread The Gospel**

A Christian friend of mine who had come from overseas spoke at our Bible study here in Idaho. This person told the class that when they had moved to England for some undergraduate work, a neighbor told them, “Do not bring your religion into my home.” They honored the man's request. During the next two years, however, they became friends with this neighbor. It was then that he asked, “Can you please tell us about your Christian God?” The man and his family were eventually converted to Christ.

Most Christians believe that they need to get out in the streets and pound the pavement and rattle doors to spread the Good News. It's a noble idea but mostly ineffective. Why? Here's my shortlist:

- Most people already think they're Christians, so it annoys them to be preached to.
- Thanks to our culture, no one likes strangers knocking at the front door while eating dinner or watching TV.
- Americans, for the most part, don't care about their future. You are not going to wake them up with some magic verses.

If you want to convert someone to Christ, first take the time to get to know them. Show some concern for them. A card at Christmas, a few conversations about who you are and who they are. You get the idea. The last thing they want is for a stranger to interrupt them while they're putting groceries in the car. In my 60-odd years, I've never known anyone to be converted by a door-knocker. Does that mean it never happens? Not unless they were in dire straits due to addiction, imprisonment, etc. Again, I'm not saying it never happens, but they are the exception. Every soul is precious, regardless.

I've heard some say, “I preached them the gospel; if they go to hell, it's their fault.” Such an attitude demonstrates a lack of real love for the lost. At times, even Jesus fed the thousands—cared for them—before preaching. At the same time, those living in the times of Christ were universally hungry for the Gospel. In our overfed, overweight, and amoral American culture, you have to befriend folks to be an effective evangelist. And that, my friend, can be a long, long effort.

## **You Have To Re-Marry Your Former Spouse Before You Can Be Saved**

This is perhaps the worst doctrine I have ever encountered in the Church of Christ. Thankfully, it has almost disappeared, as the generation that promoted it have slipped quietly into Eternity.

An elderly couple in the church where I preached told me about a man who came into a Sunday morning service to be saved. They shuffled him off to the office to ask him some questions, which is par for the course. Many have little idea of biblical teaching on salvation. For example, when my former wife wanted to be baptized, the preacher told her she would have to repent and get rid of the sin in her life. She turned around and walked out. She was killed in a car accident a few years later.

So this man was in the church to “get saved.” When the elders asked him about his marital status, he told them he was married with a couple of children. Any previous wives? Oh, yes, he replied, but that divorce was years ago. The elders told him that before he could be saved, he would have to divorce his current (and therefore illegal) wife, and re-marry his first wife. The man was stunned and walked out.

The elderly couple telling me this story seemed quite proud of this event. I asked them the reason behind it. They replied, “Because the Bible doesn't permit divorce, anyone getting a divorce and marrying another is committing adultery.” Says so in the Bible.

I asked them the most obvious question: How does one hunt down a long-lost spouse, who may have several children by their new husband or wife, convince them to divorce so they can re-marry, so that the person can be saved?

They responded, “They shouldn't have gotten a divorce in the first place.”

I've not spent a lot of time on this issue, since it's nearly extinct. I put it here to show how cruel some folks can be. I certainly would not want to be the one answering God on why I prevented someone's salvation based on a flawed understanding of the Bible.