

Jesus Plus Nothing?

Jeff Asher's Review Of A Baptist Tract

A brother in Mississippi has sent a tract distributed in his area by a local Baptist Church. The tract was sent with an invitation to visit the church and “accept Christ” per the instructions given in the leaflet. Our brother felt that some attempt should be made to correct the errors presented in the tract while at the same time teaching his Baptist neighbors the truth of the gospel. Therefore, we have written the “pastor” of this Baptist Church a letter appealing to him from the Scriptures.

What follows is a reproduction of the tract and the text of the letter we sent to the “pastor.” We have placed it here for others to read and study. Hopefully, we can benefit many through the teaching of truth by a comparison of the Scriptures with the popular doctrine of the modern Baptist Church. It is not our intent to offend or anger our friends who have embraced the Baptist faith. Rather, we invite an open exchange of ideas and a thorough investigation of the Word of God.

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Jesus Plus Nothing

NONE OF THESE THINGS WILL SEND YOU TO HELL.

Drinking booze, taking dope, smoking cigarettes, smoking pot, gambling, beating your wife, being a homosexual, living together, abusing your children, cursing, committing adultery, lying, stealing or committing murder.

For the wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23

But commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 10:9

JESUS SAID THIS ABOUT HELL.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: For wide is the gate, and *broad* is the way which leads to *destruction*, and *many* there be which go in thereat. Matthew 7:13

NONE OF THESE THINGS WILL SEND YOU TO HEAVEN.

Being a church member, being baptized, taking communion, being a pastor, being a deacon, being at church each week, teaching a Sunday School Class, singing in the choir, giving money to the church, doing good works, or being a good moral person.

For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God, not of works lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8,9

As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one. Romans 3:10

JESUS SAID THIS ABOUT HEAVEN.

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few therebe that find it. Matthew 7:14

THE WAY TO HEAVEN

Pray -- Lord Jesus, I have sinned against you. Forgive me of my sin of unbelief. I trust you as my Saviour and Lord. Thank you dear Jesus for saving me. (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:13)

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December 10, 1997

Dear Mr. Westmoreland:

A neighbor of yours, Mr. W.L. Yarbrough, has forwarded to me a tract entitled *Jesus Plus Nothing*. I am uncertain whether or not you are the author of the tract, but infer that you do endorse its contents since your name appears on it along with that of the Bethel Baptist Church. Mr. Yarbrough has asked me to examine the tract respecting its truthfulness.

My examination of this tract will consist entirely of an appeal to the Scriptures. I will of course point out wherein this tract departs from them. In doing so I want to make sure you understand that my opposition is to what I perceive to be error in the tract and not against you or any member of the Bethel Baptist Church. If your objective is to convert men to Christ, then in order for you to do so you must have the truth (John 8:32). Thus, please receive my comments in the spirit of an Acquila to an able Apollos (Acts 18:26).

The proposition which the tract advances is: "*Jesus plus nothing is the way to heaven.*" However, I am quite certain that even you do not believe this. Is it possible for a man to be saved without repentance and faith? (Luke 13:3,5; John 3:16) If, as the tract implies, salvation is strictly a matter of grace beginning and ending in what Jesus did on the cross, would it not necessarily be true that all will be saved since *the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men?* (Titus 2:11) Knowing that you believe repentance and faith to be essential to salvation, and that you reject the idea of universalism, I must conclude that when you say "nothing" you overstate your case.

That you really do not mean "nothing" is also apparent in your instructions to pray what is commonly referred to as the sinner's prayer. Is that prayer "something" or "nothing"? If it is "nothing," can a man be saved without praying it? If it is "something," then isn't your proposition false and the tract misleading? Where in the Bible do you ever find a man praying the sinner's prayer? Jesus never commanded it. The apostles never authorized it. No New Testament convert was ever instructed to offer it. The Bible is absolutely silent on this matter of a sinner's prayer. As a matter of fact, my

Bible says that such a prayer is an abomination to God (Proverbs 15:8,29; 28:9). You do cite two passages in connection with the instruction to pray. However, Acts 16:31 says *believe* and Romans 10:13 says *call*. In the former context, Paul preached Jesus to the Jailer which included faith, repentance and water baptism (Acts 16:33). In Romans, Paul is quoting Joel 2:32 which Peter also quoted in Acts 2:21. Just as Paul answered the question for the Jailer, so Peter answered it for the three thousand on Pentecost telling them to believe, repent and be baptized in water (Acts 2:36-38). This is what it means to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. This is also what Ananias told Paul. In neither context does an apostle tell an alien sinner to pray the sinner's prayer.

Now, I am beginning to understand what you mean when you say "plus nothing." What you really want to say is *Jesus without water baptism is the way to heaven*. You see we are agreed that faith is essential to salvation, and that repentance is essential as well. Where we part company is over this matter of water baptism. Thus, in what sense are repentance and faith "nothing" as far as you are concerned? Not in the sense that they are unimportant, but in the sense that they are not works of the kind excluded by such passages as Ephesians 2:8,9 and Romans 3:27,28.

The New Testament teaches us that faith is a work (John 6:29). It is not something which God does for us. The Pharisees asked, "*What shall we do, that we might work the works of God.*" Jesus answered, "*This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.*" Neither is repentance something that God does for us. Repentance is *worked* (2 Corinthians 7:10). But, as Paul says, neither of these are of such a nature that we may boast (Ephesians 2:8,9). Thus, not all and every work is excluded from our salvation, only those works in which we may boast.

Of what class is water baptism? Is it a work of our own righteousness in which we may boast? Or, is it like faith and repentance a work of God in which we cannot boast that results in our justification as did the works of father Abraham (James 2:20-24)? Paul tells us what kind it is in Titus 3:5, "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.*" The only washing in the Bible that is associated with salvation is water baptism (Acts 22:16). This is the work of Christ cleansing the church (Ephesians 5:26), it is not a man cleansing himself through works of merit. Jesus is the author of salvation to all them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:8,9). It is Jesus that said, "*He that believes and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16).

Therefore, baptism is by nature an act of faith. It is "*he that believes and ...*" that is saved. Baptism is effective by virtue of our "*faith in the working of God*" (Colossians 2:11,12). There is no trust in ourselves, it is in Christ "*by the resurrection*" that baptism does "*now save us*" (1 Peter 3:21,22). Unlike your sinner's prayer, the New Testament is filled with examples of believers being baptized. They are immersed not because they are saved, but "*for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38). In the New Testament, the saved believer is the baptized believer (Acts 16:30-34).

So, is the way to heaven "*Jesus plus nothing*"? Not according to the Scriptures. For the alien sinner the way to heaven is the way of faith (Romans 10:10), repentance

(Acts 11:18), confession of faith (Romans 10:10) and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

I also noticed that you included the church in your list of things which are unnecessary for salvation. Yet, as with your opposition to baptism, the Scriptures are against this idea. Reconsider the consequences of what you have said.

Acts 20:28 states that the church of God was "*purchased with his own blood.*" Certainly you believe that the blood of Christ is essential to the remission of sins (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). How, then, can you deny that the church which was purchased with that blood is essential? Furthermore, Ephesians 5:23 states that Christ is the "*Saviour of the body*" which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). If the Saviour is essential must not one be among that body which He saves? To deny the essentiality of the church is ridiculous.

Among all the religious people in the world that fight against water baptism and the necessity of church membership, no one fights louder and harder than Baptists. Yet, you of all people ought to defend this truth. Without water baptism you have neither a name nor a church. And, no sect is more exclusive with respect to receiving members and extending fellowship to others on the basis of it than you. When you oppose baptism and the church you simply affirm that that Baptist religion is unnecessary to salvation. This is what I tell people, and from now on I will prove it by you.

Another subtle error which I perceived in the tract is the affirmation of the popular Baptist Doctrine of "once saved always saved" or "the impossibility of apostasy." When the tract states, "None of these things will send you to hell ... none of these things will send you to heaven ..."; you not only make it clear that you believe there is nothing a person must do to be saved, but also nothing he can do to be lost. I am not surprised that a tract published by a Baptist Church would advocate this doctrine. Baptist preachers have for many years said, "No sin from idolatry to murder will cause a child of God to be lost."

However, the Bible is clear that it is possible for a Christian to so sin as to be lost. Hebrews 3:12 states, "*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*" Again in Hebrews, "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift ... if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance ...*" (6:4-6). Paul warned the Corinthians saying, "*Take heed lest ye fall*" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Even of himself Paul said, "*I keep under my body and bring it under subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Peter joins Paul in these warnings in 2 Peter 2:20,21, as does John in 2 John 9-11.

If it is impossible for a child of God to sin and be lost why do the New Testament writers offer so many warnings and exhortations about the need to watch against falling? Furthermore, what purpose do passages like Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:7-9 serve which tell the Christian how to obtain the forgiveness of those sins which he does commit? As a matter of fact, there is even a specific example of a child of God that did

fall and was lost, Judas. Peter says, "*Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place*" (Acts 1:25). John records that he was "*a child of perdition*" that was lost (John 17:12). Now, according to your doctrine Judas could not be lost. He had the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:20); he could work miracles (Matthew 10:1-4); he cast out demons (Matthew 10:8; cf. 12:28); he preached by inspiration (Mark 6:12,13). Furthermore, if you are consistent, you must admit that Judas had "Baptist baptism," was a member of the first "Baptist Church" and "an ordained minister" in that church. This obvious contradiction between truth and Baptist doctrine alone is enough to cause men of faith to reject the whole system advanced by Baptist churches.

Every one of the sins that your tract mentions as being incapable of sending one to hell is found in Galatians 5:19-21. Paul says clearly, "*They which do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*" The list is repeated again in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 with Paul asking, "*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?*" In both passages Paul is talking to believers and warning them that they cannot practice such sins and be saved.

Mr. Yarbrough has assured me that the Church of Christ in Horne Lake would welcome a public discussion of the issues raised by this tract. You may contact him, his son, Mr. Dennis Yarbrough, Mr. Joe Nelson or Mr. Keith Pierce. All these gentlemen are members of the Horne Lake Church and preach the gospel when given opportunity.

I intend to make this letter public by posting it on my Webpage and replying to the tract on my weekly radio broadcast. I will also seek to have it published in *Faith and Facts Quarterly*, a periodical subscribed to by many Christians in the South and Midwest. Should you wish to reply, I will certainly make it available through the same venues. I sincerely look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Very sincerely yours,

Jeffrey S. Asher

cc: W.L. Yarbrough