

SYLVIA'S CORNER

I AM A CHRISTIAN

"I am a Protestant. I believe that God loves everyone. As long as I am a good person, as long as I do my best, and as long as I don't hurt anybody, I will go to Heaven." These were the words spoken by my good friend, Janice, and this was also the tenet that I subscribed to at one time.

Janice's words saddened me, causing me to think of Satan's subtle ploy. He loves to make us think that all we have to do is be good enough and we'll get to enter through those "Pearly Gates". However, that's not what the Bible says.

First of all, none of us is perfect. Let's look at the Bible to substantiate this. In Romans 3:23 (NIV), it says, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." And in Romans 3:10, "There is no one righteous, not even one." So from this we see that no matter how many good works we do, unless we are perfect, which these two scriptures say we are not, we can never reach Heaven on our own merits.

Adam and Eve's sin became a consequence for all of us. Once God's law was disobeyed and the fruit was eaten, man was separated from God's continuous presence. That action brought death into the world: first, spiritually, then physically. This created a gap between us and God that could never be bridged by our own efforts.

Let's take a look at the ways individuals try to resume this fellowship with God on their own. They try religion -- a religion of good works. They try philosophy -- the reasoning of men.

They try to win favor with good deeds. What they don't realize is that on our own merit, none of us is good enough to win God's acceptance. If we examine the text in James 2:10 in the NIV Bible, we find that it says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." So if we tell just one little white lie, think one sinful thought, falsify something on our income tax, we could never be acceptable to our Heavenly Father

I grew up as a member of a mainline church. I attended Sunday School and church services regularly with my parents. I had studied the Bible in my classes, had head knowledge, but not a personal experience with the Lord. Despite my participation in many programs in the organization that I belonged to, I later found that the most crucial principle in the Word of God had not been taught to me. I had never been told that I personally needed to invite Jesus Christ to be the Lord of my life, ask Him to come into my heart and live His life through me, and forgive all my sins. I was to find later that this was the only way to restore fellowship with God and get to Heaven.

As a result of not having this information and not being taught of its' importance, I was led astray by a cult (**Mormonism**) that promised more information than what my religion had offered. This group came along and said that my religion did not have all the truth, only some of it. They seemed to have more. They said that the Bible was only accurate when translated correctly. My head knowledge was not enough to protect me. I remained in this group for many years sincerely thinking it was the right thing to do. I praise God that He had a plan to deliver me from it and to show me the truth. From my personal experience, I learned that when it comes to religion, the only thing that really matters is what we do with Jesus Christ. This is the key to our eternal destiny, and is what my Pastor calls, "Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing". It is a shame but many churches are not teaching this today.

Searching further in the Bible, we can find many references to the human race being lost. Let's take a look at a few of them while remembering that our original parents were not separated from God's presence until Adam chose to disobey Him in Genesis 3.

In Luke 19:10, NIV, Jesus said, "For the Son of man came to seek and save that which was lost." If we weren't lost, why would He have to save us? Then in 2 Peter 3:9, it says, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish." Therefore, doesn't it make sense that we must be in a perishable condition?

There are three parables given by Jesus in Luke 15. The first one speaks of an owner of 100 sheep who

loses one of them. He later finds it and rejoices. Jesus compares that story with the joy in Heaven when one sinner repents. Next, He cites an example of a woman that has ten silver coins, loses one, later finds it, and calls her friends to rejoice with her. Again, in this example, Jesus speaks of the joy in Heaven when one sinner repents. Lastly, He speaks of a man who has two sons -- one who had gone astray. The wayward son left home, squandered his wealth, and lived wildly. With a repentant spirit, that son later returned. His father welcomed him back and explained to his older son that his brother was lost at one time, but now was found. All of these examples attest to our lost condition before accepting Jesus.

If we harden our hearts and decide that we don't need a relationship with God, all the good conduct in the world will not be able to save us.

My friend, Janice, is right about one thing. God does love her. However, His love does not guarantee her eternal destination. Her RESPONSE to His love is what does. Janice needs to make a distinction between being loved and being saved.

I guess God could have created robots. Then everyone could have gone to Heaven. However, it seems to me that God isn't interested in our being forced to love Him. He's more interested in our doing it of our own free will. His love for us provides us with an opportunity to clearly make a choice as to where we want to spend eternity. Jesus Christ is a gentleman. He waits to be invited into our hearts and lives.

Without letting go of our pride, ego, and self-sufficiency, we can't possibly experience that personal relationship that our Lord is willing to have with us. The choice is ours to make.

If I had learned this crucial truth years ago, I might have been spared much grief. In my opinion, and I hope yours, there is no more important principle in scripture. And to think that but for the grace of God, I almost missed it!