“Monica...is a woman who is little known but whose son had a profound impact on men such as Martin Luther and John Calvin and whose writings helped to shape the course of the Reformation, over 1000 years later.”

Lizzie Hyde
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John MacArthur

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Are you a Christian? Many people who claim to be point to some event in the past to substantiate their claim. But inviting Jesus to come into your life in the past is not proof that you are genuinely saved. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul says to the Corinthian church, “Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves (emphasis added).” He wouldn’t have said that if some event in the past were obviously the answer. The Bible never verifies anyone’s salvation by the past but by the present. If there is no evidence of salvation in your life now, you need to face the fact that you may not be a Christian. You need to examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith. How does one do that? Jesus shows us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

**THE DISTINGUISHING MARK OF A CHRISTIAN**

Before Jesus was born, the religious leaders of Israel had already decided what it meant to live righteously. They had developed a system contrary to Scripture based on self-righteousness generated by doing good works. When Jesus entered the world, He shattered their religious system by upholding the standard revealed in God’s Word. He revealed how a citizen of His Kingdom really lives.

If you want to know if you’re a Christian, compare your life with the standard Christ presents in the Sermon on the Mount. One word summarizes His standard:
righteousness. Examine the lives of many professing Christians, and you’ll find no such righteousness. Someone once told me about a woman who said she was a Christian but was living with a man who was not her husband. First Corinthians 6:9 says that those characterized by sexual immorality (“fornicators”) “shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” That woman was living in a state of unrighteousness. But righteousness characterizes true conversion.

Matthew 5:20, the key verse in the Sermon on the Mount, says, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The scribes and Pharisees went to the Temple regularly, paid tithes, fasted, and prayed constantly. But Christ wasn’t impressed with their religious performance. He said no one would enter His Kingdom whose righteousness didn’t exceed theirs. Righteousness—living by God’s standards—is what sets a person apart as God’s child.

Hebrews 12:14 says, “Follow ... holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” Second Timothy 2:19 says, “The Lord knoweth them that are his; and, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” Titus 1:16 says that some people “profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.” A person’s profession of Christ means nothing apart from obedience and holiness. Some people believe you can come to Jesus Christ without a consequent change in life-style. But God expects a transformation. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Being righteous doesn’t mean you never sin; it means you confess your sin to the Lord, repent of it, and despise it. First John 2:3 says, “By this we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” In John 14:15 Christ said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” First John 2:9 says, “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.” First John 3:9 says, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

The Bible makes it clear that those who are genuinely saved are righteous and holy. They still sin, but with decreasing frequency. A true believer hates his sin (cf., Rom. 7:15-25) and repents of it, hungering and thirsting for what is right. He obeys God, loves his brother, and hates the evil world system. No one can be a Christian and continue living the way he did.

‘If your life didn’t change when you were supposedly saved then you aren’t really a Christian.’
before he knew Christ. Making a decision years ago, going to an inquiry room, walking an aisle, or reading a tract on how to accept Christ is not a biblical criterion for salvation—the issue is what your life is like right now. If sin and unrighteousness characterize your life, there is a possibility you are a disobedient Christian—but there is a greater possibility you are not a Christian at all.

**THE PROPER ENTRANCE INTO CHRIST’S KINGDOM**

In Matthew 5:3 Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The Greek text indicates that the Kingdom belongs only to those who are poor in spirit. Only those who admit their spiritual bankruptcy and sinfulness can enter the Kingdom. Being “poor in spirit” speaks of being poverty stricken in one’s spirit. Verse 4 shows the result of that inner poverty: “Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.” Only those who are broken and mournful over their sin ever receive salvation. Meekness, produced by the crushing weight of one’s sin, also characterizes a person entering the Kingdom (v. 5). When a person is poor in spirit, mournful about his sin, and meek, then he will hunger and thirst after righteousness, and he will be filled (v. 6).

If you didn’t come to Jesus Christ shattered over your sinfulness, and hungering and thirsting after righteousness, you are not a Christian. Some people come to Christ as if they are doing Him some great favour. Sometimes Christians reflect that same attitude by hoping some famous person will be saved because of his potential influence. But whoever wants to come to Jesus must come on His terms: mourning over his sin, and desiring righteousness. When someone comes on those terms, the Lord makes him merciful (v. 7), pure in heart (v. 8), and a peacemaker (v. 9). Then because of what he is, people will persecute him (v. 10), revile him, and say false things about him (v. 11). But he will rejoice, because he’s a citizen of the Kingdom (v. 12).
VITAL SIGNS OF A CHRISTIAN

A DISTINCT TESTIMONY

In Matthew 5:13-14 Christ referred to believers as “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” A Christian’s lifestyle will be easily distinguishable from the world’s. Just as salt preserves decaying meat, Christians are a preservative in the midst of a decaying civilization. One reason the prophesied Great Tribulation of the end times will be so terrible is the preserving effect of the church will be gone. Christ compares His disciples to a light set on a hill and salt that has retained its saltiness. Is it evident to those around you that your life is different, or do you do the same things they do? If your life didn’t change when you were supposedly saved, then you aren’t really a Christian.

AN OBEDIENT LIFE

A child of God is characterized by obedience. In Matthew 5:17-19 our Lord said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Christ’s point is this: if you are truly saved, you will be obedient. You will have an overwhelming desire to submit to God’s Word. Paul hungered to obey God’s Word, even though sin was always tugging at him (Rom. 7:15-25). Matthew 5:21-32 maintains that if you have really been converted, you will think differently. Apparently the Israelites controlled their outward behaviour but not their thoughts. The Lord said to them, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment; but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment” (vv. 21-22). A believer doesn’t even desire to hurt anyone—let alone kill—because he has a different heart. In Ezekiel 36:26 God promises that when you become redeemed, He “will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and ... will give you an heart of flesh.”

In Matthew 5:27-28 Christ says that a Christian is not to commit adultery or even entertain adulterous thoughts. Someone who claims to be a Christian and continues to be immoral, practicing such things as adultery or homosexuality, will never inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Until you are broken over your sinfulness and crawl into Christ’s Kingdom hungering for righteousness, you will never know what true redemption is.

In Matthew 5:33-37 Christ discusses perjury and keeping one’s oaths. He emphasized that true conversion produces pure and truthful speech, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). In Matthew 5:38-47 He adds that a citizen of His Kingdom doesn’t retaliate but is kind. He loves his neighbour (v. 43), and even his enemies (v. 44). The goal is for believers to be like God (v. 48).

No one is a Christian because he went forward at a meeting and signed a card, or because a counsellor said he was. In fact, a counsellor should never assure someone he is saved after that person verbally commits his life to Christ. No counsellor can be sure of that. It is the Holy Spirit’s job to grant assurance to a believer. He grants it by an inward testimony (Rom. 8:16) and an outward demonstration.

James 2:17 says that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead.” An unfortunate legacy of modern evangelism is that one’s assurance of salvation is attached to a decision. Biblically, however, assurance has nothing to do with the past; it’s related to what your life is like right now. Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31). Evidence of salvation is always present in a true believer.

SINCERE WORSHIP

A believer demonstrates the right kind of worship (Matt. 6:1-18). His worship of God is genuine, in contrast to that of the Pharisees, whose only concern was attracting attention to their spirituality. A Christian gives of his resources because He loves God, not because he craves public recognition (6:1-4). His...
prayers aren’t hypocritical but a sincere expression of his heart (6:5-15). Also he doesn’t need for others to know that he’s fasting (6:16-18).

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MONEY AND MATERIALISM

According to Matthew 6:19-24 the citizens of Christ’s Kingdom don’t love money: they do not lay up for themselves “treasures upon earth” (v. 19). They refuse to serve money because they know it’s impossible to serve both it and God (v. 24). If you have committed your life to acquiring wealth, you are not a servant of God. If you are a friend of the world, you are an enemy of God (James 4:4). If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you (1 John 2:15). Matthew 6:25-34 adds that Christians are not to be preoccupied with the necessities of life. They know God takes care of those things (vv. 31-32).

AN UNCRITICAL LOVE OF OTHERS

Matthew 7:1-12 emphasizes that genuine believers have good relationships. They don’t constantly misjudge other people and act pious toward them while ignoring their own problems. Christians are known for loving others (cf., John 13:35).

Perhaps after this survey of what Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount, you are wondering how anyone could ever live like that. If you’re thinking it’s impossible to do all those things, that’s the very response the Lord wants. After confronting a rich young ruler with his materialism, Jesus said to His disciples, “Verily I say unto you that a rich man shall with difficulty enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:23-24). It’s impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle! That’s exactly what the Lord wanted people to conclude. Verses 25-26 say, “When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who, then, can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” No man has the resources within himself to live up to God’s standards. That’s why we have to cast ourselves on the mercy of God. The rich young ruler in Matthew 19 wasn’t willing to do that. He wanted to enter the Kingdom but on his terms. However, that’s like trying to put a camel through the eye of a needle. The only way into the Kingdom is by becoming broken in spirit, mournful, and eager for a righteousness that you can’t attain and don’t deserve. Most people don’t want to meet those conditions. They want to do things their way. They resemble a man with four pieces of luggage—worldliness, sin, Satan, and self—trying to get through the turnstile into the Kingdom. They want in so they can have happiness and stay out of hell, but they want in on their terms. However, the Lord said, “Enter in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in that way” (Matt. 7:13). Many people enter through the wide gate because they can take their baggage of good works and self-righteousness with them. Verse 14 continues, “Narrow is the gate, and hard is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” The Greek word translated “hard” literally means “compressed.” You have to strip yourself of everything to go through the narrow gate.
A DECEPTIVE ILLUSION OF ETERNAL LIFE

Notice that the broad way leading to destruction is not marked as the way to hell—it’s marked as the way to heaven! People get on the broad road because it doesn’t require a change of life-style. You simply have to say you made a decision, were baptized, went forward at a meeting, or signed a card. The sad thing is that many people are on that road. But the way that leads to life is restrictive, and very few find it. If you still cling to your worldliness and self-righteousness, you’re on the wrong road. You may think you’re headed to heaven and that your good works will get you in. But someday you will discover what John Bunyan described in The Pilgrim’s Progress: that there is an entrance to hell from the portals of heaven. In fact Christ warned people to beware of false prophets (Matt. 7:15-20) because they sell tickets to the broad way; they’ll tell you that you can get to heaven without changing anything. In Matthew 7:21-22 Jesus says, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out demons? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Many people won’t discover until it’s too late that they were on the wrong road. Christ concluded the Sermon on the Mount by illustrating the destinations of the broad and narrow roads. In Matthew 7:24-25 He speaks of a wise man who builds his house on a solid foundation. Verse 25 says, “The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.” That man came to God on His terms—he built his house on the rock, which is obedience. Therefore his house stood. Christ continues, “Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand” (v. 26). The foolish man built a beautiful house; his religion looked good. He is one of those who prophesied, cast out demons, and did wonderful works (v. 22) but never came to God on His terms. Verse 27 says, “The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.” What a disaster it would be to come before Christ on Judgment Day and discover you are sentenced to hell because you didn’t come to Him His way! Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith. As Peter said, “Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you” (2 Peter 1:10 ; New American Standard Bible).

JOHN MACARTHUR

John is Pastor-Teacher at Grace Community Church Los Angeles. He is also President of the Master’s University and the Master’s Seminary and featured teacher with Grace to You. Founded in 1969, Grace to You is the non-profit organization responsible for developing, producing, and distributing John’s books, audio resources, and the “Grace to You” radio and television programs. “Grace to You” radio airs more than 1,000 times daily throughout the English-speaking world, reaching major population centres with biblical truth. It also airs nearly 1,000 times daily in Spanish, reaching 23 countries across Europe and Latin America.
“There are no unimportant places or people”

John MacArthur

These are the countries where we will be holding ministry events during 2018:

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Romania
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On the west coast of the USA, in the state of California lies a city called Santa Monica. This city is home to a pair of natural springs called the Serra Springs (or weeping springs). The city is named after a woman called Monica and the weeping springs after her tears. She is a woman who is little known but whose son had a profound impact on men such as Martin Luther and John Calvin and whose writings helped to shape the course of the Reformation, over 1000 years later.

Her son was St Augustine, born in 354 AD, and he is widely regarded as one of the early church fathers. He was a prolific writer and one of his most famous works was his autobiographical Confessions. Arguably, the person that shines brightest and dances so vividly off the pages is his mother, Monica, a woman of great spiritual stature and about whom Augustine speaks with tremendous affection and admiration.

Monica was born in approximately 331AD in Tagaste, which is now in modern day Algeria, to a family with reasonable means. She was brought up by parents and servants who instructed her in the ways of the Lord and she grew up having a reverent fear and faith in a living and loving God. From a young age, Monica had a tender conscience. One incident that remained with her was when she used to sip the top of a cup of wine her parents sent her to bring for them every day; she was taunted by one of the servants for her greed and, stung by the reproach, never did it again. In early youth, a marriage was arranged for her to a man called Patricius; a pagan and a Roman official, with whom she had two sons and a daughter. Monica would not have had much, if any, input into the choice of her husband for, if she had, it is likely she would have chosen to marry a Christian man. Instead, she was married to somebody who was prone to violent
outbursts and whose mother took a dislike to Monica and treated her unkindly.

A mother’s devotion

Augustine’s Confessions were written in his forties, several years after he was converted, which renders the text more illuminating as it is written with more insight and understanding. His first specific reference to his mother is of a woman who ‘greatly trusted in Thee’. Our introduction to Monica is of a woman who had a strong and fervent faith in her Creator. One who greatly trusts is one who will lean heavily on that in which they hope, and Monica clung fiercely to her God. Augustine goes on to describe how, as a young boy, he was taken ill to the point of death. He attributes his recovery to his mother’s prayers, but testifies that her heartfelt desire for his eternal destination was greater. ‘With a heart pure in Thy faith, she even more lovingly travailed in birth of my salvation’. To travail implies great toil and effort, and he understood how his mother would have wrestled with God in prayer for him.

As Augustine grew into a young man, he began a struggle with sexual sin that would last for several years. His mother, like most mothers, knew her child, his propensities and his character well, and feared for him. He writes that she ‘feared for me those crooked ways in which they walk who turn their back to Thee, and not their face’. His father was unperturbed by these developments and it was left to his mother who, with significant boldness, warned him ‘with great anxiety’ to keep himself pure, ‘not to commit fornication; but especially never to defile another man’s wife’. Augustine reflects that, at the time, he had little concern for her words, thinking them to be ‘womanish advices’. This is indicative perhaps of the esteem with which women were regarded in those times, which makes Monica’s audacity in addressing the issue all the more admirable. In hindsight, Augustine realised that her ‘womanish advices’ were rather than he, shouldest be my father’. Yet, in spite of the difficulties she faced in her marriage, Monica endeavoured to honour her husband. Augustine speaks little of his father in his Confessions but writes of him that his mother, ‘the better, obeyed, therein also obeying Thee, who hast so commanded’. In honouring her husband, she revealed how seriously she took scripture and obedience to the Lord’s commands. This would not have been at all easy for her, but her devotion to the Lord and to His Word was remarkable.

Augustine was taught about God from a young age. His mother ensured it was so by her careful instruction but, in his youth, he turned away from biblical to heretical teachings. His father too was an unbeliever and Augustine writes that it was because of this that it was his mother’s ‘earnest care that Thou my God,
from God Himself. ‘They were Thine, and I knew it not’. Monica was holding fast to God’s Word and seeking that her son should too, faithfully admonishing him according to scripture. The depth of her desire for Augustine to keep himself unspotted from the world and turn to Christ is almost palpable as you read his words on the page.

A mother’s prayers

All the while, Monica was praying without ceasing, wetting her couch with tears. Augustine writes, ‘my mother, Thy faithful one, weeping to Thee for me, more than mothers weep the bodily deaths of their children……..her tears, streaming down, they watered the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed’. Her heartache and deep grief over her son and his unregenerate ways drove her to her knees repeatedly. She was unfailing in petitioning the throne of grace for him and refused to give up, displaying her faith in the One to whom she prayed and her knowledge and experience of the immense grace and mercy available to all who call on Him.

Augustine often referred to his mother as ‘thy faithful one’ or ‘thy handmaid’, very expressive terms which cast considerable honour on the one on whom they are bestowed. They are terms which show how closely she walked with the Lord and how earnestly she followed His commands. To the onlooker, her personal witness would have been exceptional. One who observed her extraordinary faith was a Bishop from whom she wanted her son to receive instruction. He, however, refused to do so on the basis that he felt Augustine was ‘yet unteachable’, being too proud and fixed in his mind about various heresies. He advised her to ‘let him alone awhile’ and comforted her with these words: ‘Go thy ways and God bless thee, for it is not possible that the son of these tears should perish’. The frequency and urgency of her tears and prayers were evident even to those who did not know her well, such was her devotion and zeal.

As Augustine grew, so did his ambition, and he declared his intention to go to Rome. He was only young and had already gained a mistress and a son, fathered at the age of about 18. Monica was bitterly opposed to this and followed him to the port to try and persuade him not to go. In his determination Augustine lied to his mother to escape from her grasp, and set sail. Her prayers had been that he should not go but, in His providence, the Lord allowed it and caused Monica to pray even more fervently for her son. She wouldn’t be the first to ask the Lord to prevent her child from doing something she felt to be unwise but, as Augustine himself writes, ‘the steps of a man are ordered by the Lord, and He shall dispose his way’. In this, Monica had to commit her son into the Lord’s care and he writes that ‘she betook herself again to intercede to Thee for me, went to her wonted place, and I to Rome’.

A godly character

Not long after leaving, Augustine became fearfully ill and, once again, he attributes his recovery to his mother’s unstinting prayers, though she was unaware of his illness. He then writes in his Confessions a heartfelt and moving tribute to a mother so admired and venerable: ‘But wouldest Thou, God of mercies, despise the contrite and humbled heart of that chaste and sober widow, so frequent in almsdeeds, so full of duty and service to Thy saints, no day intermitting the oblation at Thine altar, twice a day, morning and evening, without any intermission, coming to Thy church, not for idle tattlings and old wives’ fables; but that she might hear Thee in Thy discourses, and Thou
her in her prayers. Coudesth Thou despise and reject from Thy aid the tears of such an one, wherewith she begged of Thee not gold or silver, nor any mutable or passing good, but the salvation of her son’s soul?\.

This uncovers her character in yet more detail and, if we didn’t admire her already, this should surely leave us in no doubt as to the excellence of her Christian character. In this one paragraph, she is shown to be sober minded and serious about the things of God. She avoided gossip and did not miss an opportunity for prayer but prayed continually. She loved and tended to brothers and sisters in Christ, caring little for perishable items like silver and gold but caring more for souls, having an unwavering eternal perspective and a mind fixed on Christ, ready to hear His voice. In fact, she embodied the two great commandments given by Christ in Matthew 22 verses 37-40 and possessed that quiet and gentle spirit that the apostle Peter endorses in 1 Peter 3.

Her faith and boldness of spirit is again exhibited as Augustine writes of the time she sailed to Italy to come and visit him and, on the voyage, there was a fearsome storm. On this occasion even the mariners were afraid, and Monica was the one who comforted them. She felt that the Lord had assured her of a safe arrival and her faith was unflinching, even in the storm - so much so that she was able to comfort and encourage others, some of them tough, sea-faring men, though she was a woman and probably unused to travelling by sea.

On another occasion, she humbly submitted to those in authority over her. As was her practice in Africa, she would bring cakes, bread and wine to the churches she visited in Milan, where Augustine lived, but one doorkeeper forbade her to do so. Augustine writes that she ‘piously and obediently embraced his wishes’, and he marvelled at how ‘readily she censured her own practice, rather than discuss his prohibition’. It speaks of a heart that was anxious not to put a stumbling block in the path of others and one who esteemed others more highly than herself, whether a bishop, priest or doorkeeper.

Bishop Ambrose of Milan, who was an influence for good in Augustine’s life, also had a very high opinion of Monica, and she of him. Augustine writes that his mother loved him ‘most entirely; and he her again, for her most religious conversation, whereby in good works, so fervent in spirit, she was constant at church; so that, when he saw me, he often burst forth into her praises; congratulating me that I had such a mother.’ Ambrose held high rank in society and the aristocracy and was well esteemed in Milan. He saw in Augustine’s mother that goodness and Christlikeness that surpassed rank and role, even his own. To ‘burst forth’ in unsolicited praise of this woman signifies the meaningful impact her godly character had on others.

With such individuals, it is often through the fire of trials and testing that they are brought forth as gold. Monica had been through that refining process. Married to an unbelieving and volatile husband with an unkind mother-in-law and a wayward son, she had a hard and difficult life. Yet, her response was to cling to her Rock and her Redeemer and to live for Him, seeking to be godly and gracious in all that she did. This determination and faithful perseverance had its rewards. She learned to manage her husband’s moods and proclivities to the extent that they lived in relative domestic peace, to the amazement of their neighbours who knew her husband’s character. Using her experience, she would also advise other women on marriage issues and Augustine reflects that, ‘those wives who observed it found the good, and returned..."
thanks; those who observed it not, found no relief, and suffered’.

Monica even managed to win her mother-in-law over with ‘persevering endurance and meekness’ to the point where ‘they lived together with a remarkable sweetness of mutual kindness’. Quite a feat! Monica was a truly remarkable and outstanding woman, in faith and conduct.

Mourning turned to joy

One of her greatest joys must have been the conversion of her husband. Augustine writes that ‘she served him as her lord; and did her diligence to win him unto Thee’. This loving diligence and her persistent prayers eventually had a wonderful outcome. ‘Finally, her own husband, towards the very end of his earthly life, did she gain unto Thee’. Her prayers and faithful witness, which made her ‘admirable unto her husband’, were used by the Lord to bring him to repentance and faith in Christ.

This joy could have been matched only by what she would have experienced at her son’s conversion at the age of 31. Augustine writes that, when his mother was told, ‘she leaps for joy, and triumpheth, and blesseth Thee——Thou didst convert her mourning into joy, much more plentiful than she had desired’. How the depth of grief she felt over her son’s sin must have risen into heights of euphoria over his salvation.

It was not long after this that Augustine and his mother set out to return to Africa, and it was on this journey that Monica would fall ill and be taken to heaven to be with the Lord she loved and so sincerely served. This was not before mother and son had enjoyed precious times of fellowship together. One particular occasion is described poignantly by Augustine: ‘We were discoursing then together, alone, very sweetly; and forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, we were enquiring between ourselves in the presence of the Truth, which Thou art, of what sort of eternal life of the saints was to be, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man………when we were speaking of these things, this world with all its delights became, as we spake, contemptible to us’.

Monica’s joy was such that she felt there was nothing left on earth for her. The Lord had granted her the desire of her heart - for her son to turn to Christ - and she herself said, ‘I have no further delight in anything in this life’. Her thoughts were heavenward, as so often they had been throughout her life.

A remarkable mother

A few days after this conversation, Monica contracted a fever and died in the Roman port of Ostia with family around her. Augustine’s sorrow was great. His love and esteem for her are poured out in the pages of his Confessions. He declared that Monica’s parents did not know ‘what a one should come from them’. Though she was and is little known, it was through her prayers and her life that a great revolution was accomplished in church history. Had it not been for her prayers and supplication over her son and his salvation, it is unlikely his subsequent life and writings would have been as rich nor used so widely throughout the world, particularly by Martin Luther and those others who studied his writings and were deeply influenced and changed by them. As we consider the magnitude of the Reformation, and the way it has steered church history, would the path have been different were it not for this faithful, godly, praying woman? Her prayers to a mighty God rose like incense and were answered in unimaginable ways, ways in which Monica herself never witnessed to their full extent. There will be many other mothers who have yearned over wayward sons, daughters and husbands. May this woman be a great encouragement and example to those mothers and to us all - a woman who possessed a great faith in an even greater God.

Lizzie Hyde

Lizzie Hyde is a Customer Service Assistant at Grace to You Europe. She is also involved with ministry to women and children in her local Baptist church and regularly participates in evangelism amongst young people through Sports Reach.
If we share the Gospel with people on a regular basis then it won’t be long before we are asked the question that forms the title of this article. If we claim to believe in the truth of John 14:6 then we must affirm that there is no other way for people to be saved, other than through the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross. Therefore, we must agree that those who don’t embrace Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour are lost and without hope. “Surely”, we are asked, “that isn’t fair, what about those people who’ve never had a chance to hear the Gospel?”

It’s a very serious question and I tend to answer it in 3 ways (however, it’s unlikely that you will be afforded the opportunity to mention all 3 so you may have to make a quick choice of what you feel is the most appropriate answer to give depending on your knowledge of the person asking the question).

- **Firstly**, the Bible teaches that the Judge of all the earth will do right (Genesis 18:25), consequently we can be sure that He will do right by them. Follow this up with your own question: “But you have heard the good news of the Gospel, so doesn’t that mean that you are without excuse?”

- **Secondly**, we are told in Scripture that those who truly seek for God will find Him. Jeremiah 29:13 and our Lord’s own words in Matthew 7:7 make this unambiguously clear. If someone is sincerely seeking for God then God will ensure they hear the Gospel. The accounts of the Ethiopian in Acts 8 and Cornelius in Acts 10 powerfully illustrate this point.

- **Thirdly**, we are told, in John 6:37 that every person given to God the Son by God the Father will come to Him. The God who ordains the end also ordains the means whereby that end is carried out. We can be absolutely confident that everyone of God’s elect will hear, or at least read the Gospel, and that God will grant them the gift of faith to enable them to believe (see John 6:65).

Bearing all the above in mind, we do not need to be fumbling about looking for an “acceptable” answer when put on the spot with this question. God IS sovereign and He will ensure that His purposes are carried out, His church is built, and His name is glorified in the salvation of sinners.

But He is also glorified in His righteous judgement of unrepentant sinners who refuse to hear and obey the Gospel in what is still a day of grace (Acts 17:30-31).

**Bob Hutton**

Bob Hutton is an Associate Evangelist with the Open Air Mission and can be regularly encountered on the streets of East Kent where he loves to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all those who will listen.
Recently I heard someone say that they love to worship, but they don’t love the church. They don’t see why a worshiper needs the church at all. After all, can’t we just worship as individuals? Here is my response:

While it is true that everything a redeemed person does should be done with both an attitude of worship and with the goal of glorifying God, there remains a special and specific role for the gatherings of the local church.

For example, Paul tells Felix that while he used to worship by “going to Jerusalem,” now he worships “according to the Way, which some call a sect” (Acts 24:11, 17). In other words, Paul’s worship was in his heart, but in tune with the worship of other Christians. This is exactly what was described earlier in Acts, when the church first started. Thousands were saved, and immediately became worshipers of the true God. That worship was evident in the fact that they “were continually devoting themselves” to meeting together (Acts 2:42). Acts 2:46 describes how this wonder and worship continued as they left the Lord’s Day gathering, but was fostered by their repeated meeting together (“in the temple” and “house to house”). Verse 47 describes how these meetings were marked by them “praising God.”

So how is a Christian’s worship fostered specifically in the gathered church? Clearly the Lord’s Day gatherings...
of the congregation are the focal point of corporate worship. The structure of the Pastoral Epistles highlights this. Worship is seen in the corporate gatherings because there, under the authority and leadership of the elders, the church takes on a life of prayer (1 Tim. 2:8), work (v. 10), and instruction (v. 11). This is where the preaching of the word happens (1 Tim. 5:17, 6:2, 2 Tim. 4:2). In that context, the elders lead the corporate gathering which gives rise to the Lord's Day worship service.

Scripture gives seven basic components of this corporate worship gathering (fellowship, the ordinances, Scripture reading, giving, prayer, singing, and most notably preaching). But it is assumed that all of these happen under the leadership of the elders, and together make up the corporate worship of the church.

1. Fellowship as Corporate Worship

The early church had their corporate worship service marked by fellowship (Acts 2:42). This fellowship grew out of the preaching of the “teaching of the word,” and was seen in the acts of the ordinances and prayer. When a congregation strives for holiness, their weekly gatherings for worship are marked by this “fellowship of light” (2 Cor. 6:14). In fact, this corporate fellowship is an act of worship because it flows out of the union each individual Christian has with members of the trinity (Phil. 2:1, 1 John 1:3 also ties this Trinitarian fellowship to the preaching of the word: “We proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”)

This fellowship is seen when likeminded believers, united in the pursuit of holiness, join together to celebrate what God is doing in their lives (1 John 1:6-7). It is in this context that the commands to mutually edifying speech become practical in how they create an atmosphere of worship (Rom. 12:16, Col. 3:9, Jas. 4:11, 5:9).

2. Ordinances as Corporate Worship

Acts presents baptisms happening both in a gathered service (Acts 2:38, 41) and outside of one (8:36). But because of the image that baptism presents of being joined to the body of Christ, it is a powerful act of worship when it happens at the gathered body of believers.

While there is gray area about how baptism relates to the corporate gathering of the church, that ambiguity is set aside in dealing with communion. Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 10-11 is a strong indication that he saw communion as being practiced in the corporate gathering of the church. In fact, he expressly says that communion should be practiced when the congregation “comes together” (1 Cor. 11:17, 18). He then goes on to lament the practice of having different parts of the church take communion independently of the rest of the body. While having three worship services (where everyone takes communion simultaneously, but three different times) seems to comply with the heart of Paul’s command, taking communion in home groups or in meetings under the leadership of only a section of the church seems to be practicing the very thing that Paul wanted to avoid with communion.

3. Scripture Reading as Corporate Worship

Paul tells Timothy that when the church is gathered, they need to “give attention to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim. 4:13). The context of 1 Timothy reveals that Paul viewed this kind of reading as connected to, but nevertheless different from, the teaching and preaching of God’s word.

Paul’s command is likely modeled on the example of Ezra in the courtyard of the temple: “Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed Yahweh the great God. And all the people answered, ’Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped Yahweh with their faces to the ground” (Neh. 8:5-6). That passage, which is preceded by similar events in the life of Israel’s kings, shows the noteworthy connection between scripture reading and worship.

I think of Scripture reading as the reading of the Word without explanation or exposition. This accomplishes the following:

• It highlights the authority of God’s Word, and that the congregation (including the elders and leaders) are under it.
• It highlights the perspicuity and clarity of God’s Word, by having it read clearly and without explanation, and seeing the force that it brings.

• It uses Scripture as much of it was intended (such as the Psalms, for example); namely, for public worship.

• This has been the practice of the church since its inception, and was also the practice of the Jews of Jesus’ time. It is practiced in most liturgical churches, and in much of the Reformation, Puritan, and Reformed traditions.

Let me be quick to grant that all of these positives don’t mandate that it be done every week. But they do argue strongly for it being the norm. Let me likewise be quick to grant that they don’t eliminate the possibility of responsive readings by/with the congregation.

4. Giving as Corporate Worship

Christians are called to be faithfully supporting the church that they worship in. Paul commands that if a Christian sits under the teaching of God’s word, they should be helping to support that pastor financially (1 Tim. 5:17-18). This command takes giving out of the realm of preference, and makes it a Christian obligation.

Elsewhere, Paul explains how that giving should happen as a part of corporate worship. Paul viewed his support as a missionary as a gift not from individuals, but from the church in Philippi as a whole (Phil. 4:15). He describes the offering he is asking for from the Roman church as one that can be received when he comes to visit the church (Romans 16:24-27).

Paul describes how this offering should be gathered on “the first day of the week” (1 Cor. 16:2). In fact, the entire chapter of 2 Corinthians 9 describes the joy of giving when the church gathers, and how that corporate giving works as an act of worship to God, in that if it is collected properly it is “producing thanksgiving to God” (2 Cor. 9:11). As the church gathers and gives, it causes a desire to hear the news of how God is using the offering to take the gospel to the world. This leads to an increase in “prayer on behalf” of missionaries (v. 14), which has the effect of causing the congregation to say “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift” (v. 15).

6. Preaching as Corporate Worship

Congregational singing, prayer, music, giving, scripture reading, and fellowship are all expressions of worship that are seen in the gathered church. But when the congregation turns to the word of God, the preaching time becomes the most intense act of worship. By the sheer humility and faith expressed in being reliant upon the Word for instruction, God is honored and worshiped. As his people come together and demonstrate their reliance on teaching from the Word to supply knowledge for living, they are manifesting that their direction comes from God. When the teaching exposes gospel truths to the Lord’s people, the worship revolves around the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This shared experience is what guides the congregation as they scatter throughout the week to do the work of the ministry (Acts 2:42, Col. 3:16, 1 Cor. 16:2, 1 Tim 5:17, etc.).

Preaching is the tool that the elders use when the body is gathered to equip the people to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). Preaching is how the Bible is taught to the congregation, so that the entire body has a shared experience in the word. The Bible is what the Spirit uses to sanctify believers, and preaching is the means in which God exposes believers to His word (Titus 1:3). Thus, the more clear and expositional the message, the more powerful the sanctifying effect of preaching (John 17:17). And because presenting our bodies as sanctified sacrifices to God is our spiritual act of worship, then preaching is the fuel for worship.
In other words, if worship that flows from a sanctified heart can only be based on right information about God, and if preaching is the tool God uses to convict people of sin and turn them to Christ, then preaching that is clear and convicting becomes the catalyst for powerful worship. If an individual’s worship will not rise above their level of knowledge, then a congregation’s worship cannot rise above the level of the pulpit.

7. Singing as Corporate Worship

If the preaching time is the loftiest form of corporate worship, the singing can be the most personal. As people sing songs with sound theology, they often sing words with better theology than they know. As the truth of the lyrics echo in their souls, God is worshiped. When singers set their minds on the things above, and proclaim them with joy, it is a public demonstration of the worth of God. They then can be used by God to direct and lead the congregation into their own acts of worship.

Thus singing is an essential part of the corporate worship service. It is commanded by Paul in Ephesians 5:19 and modeled by the Psalms. While certainly Christians don’t have to be in a congregational worship service to sing (think Christian radio, or jail—but I repeat myself; Acts 16:25), the function of a body as a whole lifting up voices to God glorifies Him in a unique way. This is why we are not only commanded to sing, but to sing “to one-another” (Col. 3:16). In light of all this, it is simply impossible for a person to love God, but not worship. And it is difficult to imagine how a person could love worship, but not the church; after all, God has designed at least 7 ways of worship that can only be done with the congregation.

JESSE JOHNSON

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