



Pure and Simple

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From the dawn of recorded history, Israelites surrounding the Sea of Galilee had been trampled beneath the heels of invading armies of Ramses II, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, and more recently, the Roman leader, Mark Anthony. It was a policy of Rome to be very liberal pertaining to worship of various gods within countries they conquered – so long as Caesar was one of them. Jews, however, believed in only one God, would not pay homage to Caesar, and for that reason were referred to as troublemakers.

Jewish citizens longed for a king, a political messiah, to lead a revolt against their oppressors. Eight hundred years earlier the Prophet Isaiah told of a child, yet to be born, who would be called “*Prince of Peace*,” would rein upon David’s throne and establish justice. But Isaiah also told of a “*Sin-Bearing Servant*,” who would be “*wounded for our transgressions*,” be “*led as a lamb to the slaughter*,” bear “*the sin of many*” and make “*intercession for transgressors*” (Isa. 9). Within this element of oppression and hope, Jesus was born.

The Hebrew word for salvation (*Yeshuw’ah*) in Old Testament script was not understood as a salvation from sin. **Devout Jews of both the Old Testament and during the time of Christ assumed and had no reason to question their salvation** (Rev. 22:14). All of Jesus’ relatives were God-fearing people who looked to the Torah and Talmud for direction. They lived according to the Law and God’s Ten Commandments, repented, and made retribution for their sins through various sacrifices of choice lambs, goats, and other offerings. Although specific instruction was given for these practices (which were to be repeated year after year as an endless atonement), **the extent of retribution needed was unknown**. Jewish priests could not enter “*The Most Holy Place*” without first performing this ritual. Two costly goats were offered; one surrendered for sin, **which Christ replaced**, the other released carrying sin – the “*Scapegoat*” (Lev. 16:7-10). It was a financial loss to abnegate choice animals, so Jesus ‘*paid the price*’ for us (1 Cor.6:20 and 1 Cor.7:22). Many years after Isaiah, another prophet, John the Baptist, described Jesus as this very person in Isaiah’s forecast when he greeted Him with these words, “***Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***” (John 1:29).

Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection eliminated, (concerning those who accepted Him) need for a continued sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9-10). His ministry also provided the greatest discourse on human ethics ever presented to man (Matt. 5). **It did not, however, eliminate other**

requirements necessary for salvation. There remained need to believe in the God of creation, abide by His Ten Commandments, and – repentance. John preached repentance as the key to forgiveness of sin (Mark 1:4). **Those requirements still remain today.**

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey during Passover week, His reception was overwhelming. Jews of that day believed He was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy for a political messiah. Many thousands of excited followers threw palm branches in His path in a symbolic representation of freedom. Their shouts of “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,*” referred to a political leader (John 19:38).

It was not intended for Christ to come into this world to start a new religion, but to preach repentance and offer assurance of salvation to the House of Israel (Luke 5:32) (Matt.15:24) (Acts 3:19). At first, few Jews neither accepted Jesus’ invitation nor followed His path. Those that did were Messianic Jews who embraced both Judaism and Jesus. Most followers thought of this penniless teacher from Nazareth chiefly as a revealer of knowledge of the one true God, and proclaimer of a law of high and strict morality. This was the message preached (exclusively) to Jews by Peter, James, John, and the rest of Jesus’ apostles before His ascension. Roman people referred to these followers as “atheists” because they had no idols or images of gods.

Originally, the apostles in Jerusalem enjoyed great freedom to share their new-found faith. They taught openly in the temple and Freed Man’s Synagogue. But between **40 A.D. and 60 A.D.,** resistance mounted from Jewish leaders, and their band spread to an eastern part of the Roman Empire where Greek language was predominant. This was made possible through Paul’s conversion and ministry to Gentiles. Known as “*Followers of the Way,*” derived from Jesus’ statement, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life,*” (John 14:6) these converts later became known as “*Nazarenes,*” referring to where Christ was from (John 1:46). It was not until **110 A.D.** that people of the church in Antioch (organized by Barnabas and Paul) were known as “*Christians*” (Acts II: 26).

Roman state religion was a political affair that offered little peace of mind to a disturbed soul. Within such conditions, Jewish recruits came with their offering of hospitality, care for homeless and food for hungry, which were foreign to heathen under Roman rule. With a promise of peace, pardon from sin for the repentant, and rest for weary, this news offered assurance, forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ – a message that struck home (Acts 4:32-36). Like wildfire, the Gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome in only 30 years.

The early church had no buildings for 150 years, which contributed greatly to its rapid expansion. Those who attended services gathered in “*church homes*” for praise, worship, encouragement, and to eat a meal or supper together. A spiritual remembrance to Jesus was part of this meal and consisted of bread served with a mixture of wine and water, a prayer of thanksgiving, and a congregational “*Amen.*” It was not until **1215 A.D.,** at the Fourth Lateran

Council in Rome, that the doctrine of transubstantiation was inferred as being official church law. An additional component of all church meetings was reciting the Apostles' Creed, which is a summary of teachings of the Apostles and first Christians. "*Creed*" is a postulation of belief from a Latin word "*credo*," meaning, "*I believe*." Churches adopted this creed so everyone might know true Christian doctrine. Assuming Christians would do more than go to a mustering once a week, evangelizing, teaching and discipling were done outside of church services, and directions were given regarding incorrect teaching.

However, even as long as 200 years after Christ's death and resurrection, there was still much about which His followers disagreed. Churches had to establish their position as authority regarding who decided biblical meaning. They exercised this through rulers or "*overseers*" (Greek word *episcopos*), from which we get "*bishop*." Bishops ruled church teaching. The city with its surrounding country was called a "*diocese*," under control of a diocesan bishop. Antioch had a bishop whose name was Ignatius, a disciple of the apostle Peter, and Smyrna had Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John. Both were martyred for their faith. Before he was burned at the stake for refusing to acknowledge Caesar, Polycarp uttered these profound words, "*Eighty-six years I have served Christ and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?*" To have been taught directly by an original apostle (for obvious reasons) gave men great authority.

For the first 1000 years of her history, the Church was essentially one. Originally, churches in various cities were only loosely connected with each other, but eventually they became welded into one compact whole. Those who were considered heretics formed little churches outside two Universal, or Catholic Churches of Antioch in the East, and Rome in the West. By middle part of the **Second Century A. D.**, all churches had in common the Apostles' Creed, and a version of the "*Cannon*," meaning "*a list*" from thousands of writings that (although assorted by mortal men) were considered "*inspired*" and would make up New Testament scripture. During this time, the first council of church leadership was held in Jerusalem where James was bishop of the Mother Church. An extension of teaching to Gentiles was reason for conveying this assemblage (Acts 15).

Soon, however, the Church in Jerusalem began to decline in authority and center of gravity looked for guidance from Eastern Church government in Antioch. In **325 A.D.**, all churches of all countries were represented in an ecumenical council held in Nicaea. **For discussion was the deity of Christ; was He truly God as His Father.** For 300 years this question divided Church thought. More than 300 bishops were present, some of whom bore on their bodies marks of tortures they had undergone for sake of their faith. Out of this council, the Nicene Creed was introduced, and eventually made law. **Ever since Nicaea, this has been a unifying belief of all Christians – Protestant and Catholic.** A second meeting held in Constantinople, in **381 A.D.**, declared **Holy Spirit and Trinity doctrines.** Teachings of Augustine (**354 A.D. to 430 A.D.**) largely dominated Middle Age Church teaching, and from this great Church Father, Catholic

Monk Martin Luther, later took inspiration.

Ephesus was the location of an additional general council meeting in **431 A.D.**, and determined **belief in original sin**. A fourth council, held in **451 A.D.** in Chalcedon near Nicaea, discussed if **Jesus was fully God and man**, which there had been disagreement. But even after 500 years of arguing, mortal men could still not leave well enough alone, and felt need to alter what Paul referred to as **“pure and simple”** devotion to Jesus Christ (II Cor. II:3), into a **“different kind of gospel”** (II Cor. II:4). In latter part of the **Fourth Century A.D.**, Western Church leadership turned to Rome for direction where its Bishop was referred to as Pope. The Eastern Church Patriarch disagreed with this supremacy and continued to head Eastern Church law rather than succumb to Rome. This would later lead to a final separation of these two original Christian churches in **1054 A.D.**

Throughout the next **1000 years**, Western Church management would go through numerous manipulations in doctrine and policy, **all having nothing to do with salvation of mankind**. In **1075 A.D.** Pope Gregory instituted a decree proclaiming that he, or any pope, could never error and could not be judged by anyone. This doctrine of infallibility was reaffirmed in **1870 A.D.** It was only a matter of time before heresies began to appear. Bones and relics of martyrs were introduced as having healing powers, prayer beads, human intermediaries between God and man other than Christ, blessed fragrances and liquids, idols of and prayer to dead people, sale of indulgences and public hatred of Jews followed. As Christianity spread through other parts of the world, concessions were made to draw converts. To appease pagans, holidays were made part of church tradition. Churches substituted heathen celebrations with feasts of Lent, All Saint’s Day, and **Christmas**, to name only a few. **Given enough time, men were able to poison the “purity and simplicity” of Christ.**

As an aftermath of numerous disagreements with Rome, Luther instigated the Protestant Reformation in **1517 A.D.** Luther reasoned that if a Pope could sanction sale of indulgences for sin (which was clearly wrong), he could also be wrong about other things and therefore was not infallible. But by this time (because people were not allowed to have access to a Bible for hundreds of years), virtually all biblical truth had been lost or distorted. Not one of hundreds of church dominations organized after the Reformation ever made it back to **“pure and simple”** devotion of early church teaching. Contrary to original practices, homeless, hungry, and naked, are seldom cared for today by any church. Heathen are not evangelized, sinners reprimanded, nor our faith defended. **Repentance and obedience have given way to an “only believe” social gospel and pagan practice that, in many cases, not only tolerates but promotes what God calls sin!**

There are no surviving First Century Roman records that refer to, nor are there any Jewish records that support accounts in our Christian Gospels — except **one**. In Rome, **93 A.D.**, Josephus published his lengthy history of the Jews. While discussing a period in which Jews of

Judea were governed by Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, Josephus included this following account: “*About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.” – Jewish Antiquities, 18.3.3 §63*

Paul wrote a church he founded in Corinth, Greece, “*But I fear, that somehow you may be led away from your **pure and simple** devotion to Christ, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent (II Cor. 11:3). **You seem to believe whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach about a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed**” (II Cor. 11:4).*

It is estimated there are 2600 groups today that claim direct connection with Old Testament theology. One reason many Christians have a hard time understanding Holy Scripture is because they read passages and see present-day social churches as being the total focus of, and authority on, all church activity – which is a major mistake. In doing so, we loose **pure and simple** devotion to Jesus Christ which was the cornerstone of early church teaching. Without the price paid by Christ we would have no knowledge of what amount of atonement God requires for our salvation. During this **Christmas season**, it is right to realize the real reason Jesus was born, which was to present Himself as a sacrifice for sins of people who sincerely repent and follow His Father’s commandments. All other theological gymnastics are but useless rhetoric, emotion, and mysticism. **Remember:** Although teachings of men and the church they organized have strayed from **pure** doctrine of Jesus’ time, His Word can never change. There cannot be a more “enlightened” or “**different kind of a gospel**” other than the **pure and simple** truth of Jesus Christ. Mortal men cannot improve on – perfection!

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