

May 18, 2001

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
12 TASKS OF AN EFFECTIVE FATHER
TASK #7: A FAITH IN CHRIST

I had quite an ordeal a couple of weeks ago. We had our annual ministry picnic at our home, and each year I borrow a couple of jet skis and wave runners, so that the guests can spin around the lake on them and have a good time. Each of the last three years, one of our neighbors has been very gracious to loan us his wave runner. It seems an appropriate thing that if you borrow someone's wave runner, and they fill it up with gas, that you would return it full of gas. On Sunday afternoon I called him to see if he had a gas tank, or can, that I could borrow to fill the wave runner with gas. You know they have these gas cans for wave runners that hold about six gallons and they have large spouts on them, and you can bend the spouts, and that makes it very convenient to pour into the wave runner. He was not home. He was out of town, and not expected back until late in the day. Finally, I decided to get this done before it got dark. I own a two-gallon gas can, which is much smaller than a six-gallon gas can. I said, "This will take three times as long, but how much gas could a wave runner hold anyway?" So, I got in my car and went to the gas station, put my credit card into the gas machine and put 2.25 gallons into the gas can. Now this particular gas can has no spout, it has a cap, but no spout. When you want to pour the gas out into the wave runner, there is nothing to help you. However, I looked around in the garage and found a funnel that my son has, that I have since determined is not for this particular kind of use. Obviously, this funnel is more for oil or brake fluid. Actually it has a label stating its use is for transmission fluid or power steering fluid. It doesn't say, "Not gas." But I can tell you that it is not made for gas. So, I came back to the house and went down to the lake. The wind was blowing. I made the mistake of putting the funnel in, and was holding the funnel with one hand. I propped the gas tank on my side and began pouring the gas into this funnel. Of course, the wind is blowing, gas is going everywhere, I am having trouble holding everything and the wave runner is moving back and forth because of the wave action on the lake. As you might suspect, when I finished I had to go back to the gas station. I was thinking, "This is a small price to pay, I am a Christian, I'm serving my brothers and sisters yesterday, and it's a gracious thing to do to return this wave runner full of gas, I'm a Christian, this is an act of service, and I am doing this with great joy." After the second trip to the gas station and back, I was thinking, "I am really suffering for Jesus, here." And then the third trip, and the fourth trip, and as I am driving back to the house from the fifth trip to the gas station, I am thinking to myself, "I don't care who Christ is, this better be enough gas." I got back and filled it up, as I was praying, "Please, Lord let this be a 10 gallon tank." Still, I had to go back to the gas station once more. I could not believe what an ordeal it was. Finally, after the sixth tank of gas, I put my credit card in to the machine and it would not accept my card because it's been used so many times in this machine and there was an anti-theft provision. So, I had to humiliate myself and go inside to buy two dollars worth of gas and the clerk had seen me come and go each time. So I said, "Hi. Do you read books? Would you like to have a copy of *The Man in the Mirror?*"

The bottom line of this is, "If you don't have the right equipment, you can waste a lot of effort. However, even if you have the wrong equipment and you fill the machine with the right fuel, the machine will work properly." Even if I had all the right gas cans and had made an error by putting diesel fuel in that wave runner, it would not have worked.

Last time we were together for the fathering series, I made the comment to you that four out of five young people who grow up in Evangelical churches will drop out by the end of their senior year in high school. The number one focus of a father should be to give his children a heart for God, and we talked about practical things that a Dad could do like prayer, like modeling, and instructing. We talked about three practical things that kids themselves could do, church, go on missions' trips, and do devotions. In some sense all of these things are very good, but in another sense they are all like the equipment but not the fuel. You can get all of these things right, men, and your kids can still leave the church.

So what I want to talk to you about this morning is you can get some of these wrong that we talked about last week, but you cannot afford to get wrong what I'm going to talk to you about this morning. You have to get this one right.

Why do kids leave the church? Really for the same reason adults leave the church. There are two very pressing questions that I think a lot of us struggle with. The first one is, can a Christian lose their faith? Secondly, how can someone attend church, profess faith, and then walk away as though nothing had ever happened.

I want to show you this morning and answer this question for your young people and adults, too, can a Christian lose their salvation, and how can someone attend church, profess faith, and then walk away like nothing had every happened?

Is this a troubling question in a general way as well as a particular way? Let's talk about this then, and if you can grasp this, you can forever resolve this question in your mind. You should be turning your Bible's to 1 John: Chapter 2, Verse 19. Now watch what I do up here. Let's just say that this square represents the world. Let's say that this box inside of that square represents the church, the visible church. Are you with me so far? Inside this invisible church box I am putting a third box that I will call the invisible church.

Watch how this works. I am going to draw four dots out here representing four different kinds of people. Here's how this works. One person in the world never comes into the church. They live their whole life and go out the other end never having come into the visible, or the invisible, church. That's pretty clear what happens there. Then, you also have a person who comes into the visible church, here, and they profess faith in Jesus, but they never truly surrender their lives to Christ. They have all the right language, all the right motion, all the right head knowledge, but they've never truly yielded their lives to Jesus in faith and repentance. So, they live their whole lives over here in this visible church and they don't make it.

Look at 1 John: Chapter 2, Verse 19. The word of God says, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us, for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." This explains how someone can have all the right words, do all the right things for a season, but then at the end, bail out.

Now, a third kind of person comes into the visible church, and this is what happened to me. I joined into the ongoing, regular activity of other Christians. In other words, I joined a group of people who were Christians, professing to be a Christian, thinking all the time I was, but then one day waking up and realizing that there was something very different, and then moving into this invisible church by confessing that I was a sinner and that I needed a savior and a Lord for my life. So this person began first in the visible church and then goes to the invisible church, and then they end up being with the Lord. Is everybody with me so far here?

The final person is the person who, perhaps, has not been in the church. They come to something like we're doing here. They hear the Gospel, and they go straight into this invisible church, and they become part of the larger body of Christ. But they go right into true faith never having been in a covenant relationship with other believers. Then, of course, they end up being with the Lord. That's it, men, that's it. That's the deal.

Now here's the big idea this morning. It is not enough for your children to be found in church. They must be found in Christ. It is not enough for your children to be found in church. They must also be found in Christ.

Now a couple of things here. If a child attends church and then falls away, there are a couple of possibilities. One possibility is that if you truly lose it, you truly never had it. You would be one of these people who, even though you were involved in the visible church, you were never a true believer. You were a professor of faith, but not a possessor of faith. These people in the invisible church are truly regenerated. These people only in the visible church are not. One possibility to explain why four out of five children growing up in Evangelical churches drop out by the end of their senior year in high school is that they never were regenerated. Their parents had them in church, they were found in church, but they were not found in Christ. That's one possible explanation.

A second possible explanation is a temporary lapse. In other words, it is possible that some of the children, the four out of five who drop out of church, are truly regenerate people, but they go through a season of prodigal or some kind of temporary lapse. How do you know? You don't know. What's the message? The message is make sure you understand it's not enough that they be found in church; they must be found in Christ.

We all want our children to be here. We all want our children to be in the true church of Jesus Christ, not just in the visible church, but in the true church of Jesus Christ. Will a child found in church generally be found in Christ? What do you think? It's not that easy to say. Is being found in church a good thing? Yes. Is being found in church sufficient for salvation? No. Will a child found in Christ generally be found in church?

Yes. Will a child found in Christ necessarily be found in church? No, because there are temporary lapses. Is falling away from the church a good thing? No. Does it necessarily mean the child is not a Christian? No.

Now I want you to turn to Romans: Chapter 6, Verse 23, and I want to help you answer the question, what must our children do to be part of the true church, the invisible church, to be in Christ? The simplest explanation of the Gospel that I've ever been able to find is this single verse in Romans: Chapter 6, Verse 23. You can summarize the Gospel in so many different ways. I'm always reminded when I say that of the story of the three blind men trying to describe the elephant. One grabbed the leg and said it was like a tree. Another grabbed its trunk and said it was like a hose. The other grabbed one of its ears and said it was like a great fan - all partly right. So, what is the explanation of the Gospel that really explains all the parts?

This one verse does a pretty good job. Let's read it: Romans: Chapter 6, Verse 23. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Now there are three parts of this. I think this is a wonderful way. You can use any method you want to explain to your children how they can be found in Christ and not in just in the church, be true Christians, true believers, part of the invisible church, be regenerated although.....

This is, I think, a very nice way of explaining it, and I have decided that this is the way that I want to explain the Gospel from now on, basically. I gave this in a talk here once a couple of years ago, and I've never gotten it out of my mind. In fact, I've included it in this new book, *Coming Back to God*. Everything in the book builds to this idea of showing men how they can come back to God or receive Christ. So here it is.

Point number one is that Adam failed. Shall I give you the whole outline then fill it in? Yes. Adam failed, Jesus nailed, Grace prevailed, and you see these three moving parts - the tree, the hose and the fan - you see these three parts in this verse. The first part of this verse says, "For the wages of sin is death..." This is the problem of man and in theology, this would be the doctrine of man, and we might say about this whole wages of sin, this death problem that Adam failed. We need to explain to our children that you are paradoxically a product of both the creation and the fall. The creation has made you like a God, and the fall has made you like a devil. In other words, the creation, Psalm 8, "What is man that you are mindful of Him, the son of man that you care for Him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and you have crowned Him with glory and honor." Son, daughter you are full expression of God's creative genius. But, also, child, Romans: Chapter 3, Verse 23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Let me read it to you right out of the book.. "The true tragedy of our existence is not what we have become, but what we could have been. We all sense by intuition that mankind has not reached its potential. We each have an instinct that tells us the human race was destined for better, that our dignity has been tarnished. Logic tells us that something catastrophic has happened to mankind. Christianity teaches that this catastrophe took place in the Garden of Eden." So that is one thing we need to explain to

our children, that although created with dignity and for glory, that has been tainted by sin. Adam failed. That's point number one. The wages of sin is death.

The next piece of this is that the gift is found in Christ Jesus, our Lord. This is the issue of Jesus. This is the doctrine of Christ, if you will, in theology.

You know, when you get into Harley's people start doing little funny things. So, somebody sent me this little Harley doll, some guy in Canada, I guess he must have had a Harley or wishes he did. Most people don't and wish they did. That's the problem with man, but after that comes the issue of Christ. There is Jesus Christ hanging on a cross. What is the problem that's solved? We need to tell our kids, it's not enough to be found in church, you have to be found in Christ. Now, there's Jesus Christ. This is a wonderful image to talk to your children about to say, okay, imagine there's Jesus Christ hanging on the cross. What is the problem that solves? The problem that solves is the wages of sin is death problem. It solves the human problem. The Christ issue solves the man problem. We all know John: Chapter 3, Verse 16 - hopefully, our children are learning that. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life."

Turn with me back to 1 John: Chapter 2, Verse 2. What is the problem that Jesus Christ solved? The problem is that because of the sin, man needs a savior. If you don't think you need a savior, then Jesus doesn't answer any questions you are asking. Our children need to understand the problem is that Jesus solves is that we need a savior.

Look at 1 John: Chapter 2, Verse 2, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." In other words, the death of Jesus on the cross, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is satisfactory, it is sufficient, for anyone who wants to take advantage of it. He died for the sins of the whole world; you still have to put your faith in it. But his atoning sacrifice is sufficient for every sin. The point our children need to understand is that no matter what you've done, you can be forgiven. Adam failed as an atoning sacrifice, Jesus nailed.

The third thing we see in this text today, Romans: Chapter 6, Verse 23 is the free gift, the gift of eternal life or you might call this the Doctrine of Salvation. We've had the Doctrine of man, the doctrine of Christ, the Doctrine of Salvation. We've had the problem of man, the issue of Jesus, the gift of eternal life. We have Adam failed, Jesus nailed, and Grace prevailed.

We had a man come here one morning, and we were talking about Christ at the end of the session. He said, "I just don't feel like I'm worthy." I said, "You're beginning to understand. You're beginning to understand. There is nothing that you can do to be good enough for Jesus to love you. There is nothing that you can do to be good enough for Jesus to love you." What did I just say? "No matter what you've done, you can be forgiven, and no matter what you do, you can't be good enough." It's a gift. It's the gift of eternal life, and all you need to do, child, to receive this gift is to do what the Apostle

Paul said and that is to turn to God in repentance and turn in faith to Jesus Christ. You can do that by inviting Him in, and you can invite Him by praying.

I did this with my daughter when she was six years old. I used the *Four Spiritual Laws* booklet, and I just read it to her. When I got down to the end, I said, "Would you like to pray this prayer and invite Jesus to come into your heart and to forgive your sins?" She said, "Yes " and we prayed together. She was six. Two years later when my son was four, my daughter led him to Christ, and neither one of them have ever turned back.

It's not enough, men, for your children to be found in church. They must also be found in Christ. Let all who have ears hear.

Let us pray:

Father, I know it would be the deepest desire of every man here that their children would not only be found in church, but in Christ. Some have had children who came into the visible church that have not yet come into true faith and repentance. Maybe they've already gone out into the world now, and maybe that father's heart is breaking. Lord, I pray that you would give him back his son, his true son, in faith. Lord, there are many men here who have sons and daughters who are in the visible church. I pray that you would help each man here to reckon with whether or not that child is also part of the invisible church, that he would make sure of his childrens' salvation. Help them to understand that Grace has prevailed through Jesus Christ. And, Lord, for whatever other issue is raised out of this, Lord, I pray that you administer through your Holy spirit to each of these men here this morning, and I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

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