

# *Testimony*

by Yvonne Hess

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## **My 33-Year Search for Peace**

I was 12 years old when I earnestly began to think about God. It happened when I read some religious literature that someone had stuffed between books at the public library. Some of the booklets discussed sin and warned that God will someday return to judge sinners. That was a scary thought since I didn't have to be a genius to know that the lies, occasional cheating, swiping things, and mouthing off to my parents were all classified as "sin." It was clear that God wouldn't be holy if He compromised on the issue of sin and allowed anyone contaminated with it into His presence, so I was uncomfortably aware that, as a sinner, I was heading toward Hell.

My response? I decided that I needed to solve my sin problem if I were to escape facing God's wrath some day. "It should be quite easy to obey God's commandments once I know what they are," I surmised. Was I mistaken! As I listed every commandment that I encountered in the Bible and added it to my "To Do List." I was frustrated to find that I couldn't get through even part of a day, let alone an ENTIRE day, without sinning in some way! So, living an entire life without sinning was hopeless.

And, the most impossible commandment of all was Deuteronomy 6:5! "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." How could I ever love God with ALL my heart and ALL my soul and ALL my might, as He commands? With a sinking feeling in my heart, I knew deep down that I could never reach the perfection that God seemed to require of people; yet I felt it was a swim-or-sink issue. After all, who wants to face an angry God when he dies? So I kept looking for an elusive peace; and, although many people now considered me to be a serious, devout girl, I felt that the chasm between God and me seemed only to grow wider.

When I was in my late teens, I began to attend a Baptist church with my family. My Sunday school teacher, Mrs. J., told me that all I had to do was to confess that I was a sinner, believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sin, and ask Jesus into my heart. Admiring her own bright assurance and hoping that I might learn the secret of her confidence, one day I agreed to meet with her after the Sunday evening service to discuss salvation.

That Sunday night, in spite of my intense desire for peace, I found myself strangely resistant to her urgings to be saved, but she was persistent. She pursued a series of verses, known as "The Roman Road," and when she reached Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," she encouraged me to ask Jesus to come into my heart. At first I resisted her prompting but, with tears of embarrassment for initially displaying such defiant opposition, I finally knelt beside her and followed her in prayer.

At that point Mrs. J. joyfully hugged me, pronounced me "saved" and told me to tell everyone I knew about it. I did exactly that. But within two days I was filled with doubts again. "Had I repented ENOUGH?" "Had I said the right words in my prayer?" "Had I really MEANT what I had prayed?"

When I confessed my doubts to Mrs. J., she told me, "The devil is just trying to ruin your joy and confidence. Just remember what you did last Sunday night and write that date in your Bible." She urged me to "go forward at the next altar call and then be baptized." I did. But nothing Mrs. J. said could ease those nagging doubts that seemed to mock my deepest concerns about my soul. My assurance swung like a pendulum: some days I thought I was saved, but on other days I knew I was lost.

In a desperate search for peace, I read dozens of tracts that contained pre-written prayers and dotted lines on their last page for a seeker to sign to supposedly receive salvation. I signed those tracts and I prayed the sinners prayers that they listed, but I still couldn't escape the hopeless feeling that I was spiritually lost.

Years passed, then decades. Finally, one summer day in 1989, when I was randomly flipping through a Bible looking for something interesting to read, I glanced at the last couple of verses of Isaiah 52. Strange verses, yet

compelling. I continued into Isaiah 53, and I was suddenly transfixed by verses five and six. I had read them in the past, but suddenly they made sense!

I knew at once that the chapter was speaking of the punishment that Jesus bore on the cross for my sins. His back was slashed open with whippings that I deserved instead of Him! He was bruised for MY sin; the punishment that He willingly endured made it possible for ME to have peace with God instead of the Hell that I deserved. The puzzle pieces finally were coming together.

I knew that a fair and holy God couldn't punish both JESUS AND me for my sin, so in one flash of understanding God gave me eternal peace that is based on what JESUS did, rather than on something that I did on a certain night. That's the only peace that lasts.

My abracadabra prayer that I had repeated with my Sunday school teacher had been as superstitious as if I had recited a magical incantation, and that's why it never gave me peace. I was basing salvation on ME -- my prayer, my tears, my feelings, my walk up the aisle, my baptism--ME, ME, ME.

But now I understood that salvation depends on believing on what JESUS did. God will never share the credit for salvation with anyone but Him; my part was simply to believe that my sin debt was paid, and to trust God to be true to His promises. It had taken me over thirty-three years to believe this simple truth. What indescribable peace!

My great concern is for you, dear reader. Are you trusting something YOU did on a certain date instead of what HE did on that date in history when He hung on the cross? Are you trusting YOUR walk up an aisle rather than trusting HIS walk to the cross, and His death there on your behalf? And, if you believe that you are saved, do you really know what became of your sins? I once thought that they were simply "washed away," but they WEREN'T washed away until Jesus paid the debt that those sins had accrued.

With the other Sunday school students, I used to sing: "Gone, gone, gone, gone, yes my sins are gone; ... buried in the deepest sea ...etc." But the part of salvation that I never heard was that, before sins could be buried in that sea, Jesus had to bear the torrent of God's wrath against them, as if He, Himself, had committed them! It was only AFTER Jesus, the innocent victim, paid the FULL penalty for every sin I ever sinned, and that I will ever commit, that Jesus was able to shout victoriously, "IT IS FINISHED!" and God was willing to commit those sins to the bottom of the deepest sea. God proved His full satisfaction with Jesus' death as our sin-bearer by permitting Jesus to be raised from the dead -- something He couldn't have done if any trace of sin remained on Him. And, praise God, nothing can ever undo what Jesus has already accomplished!

Now that is the basis of true peace!

*“He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities,  
the chastisement of our peace was upon Him,  
and with His stripes we are healed”  
(Isaiah 53:5)*

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