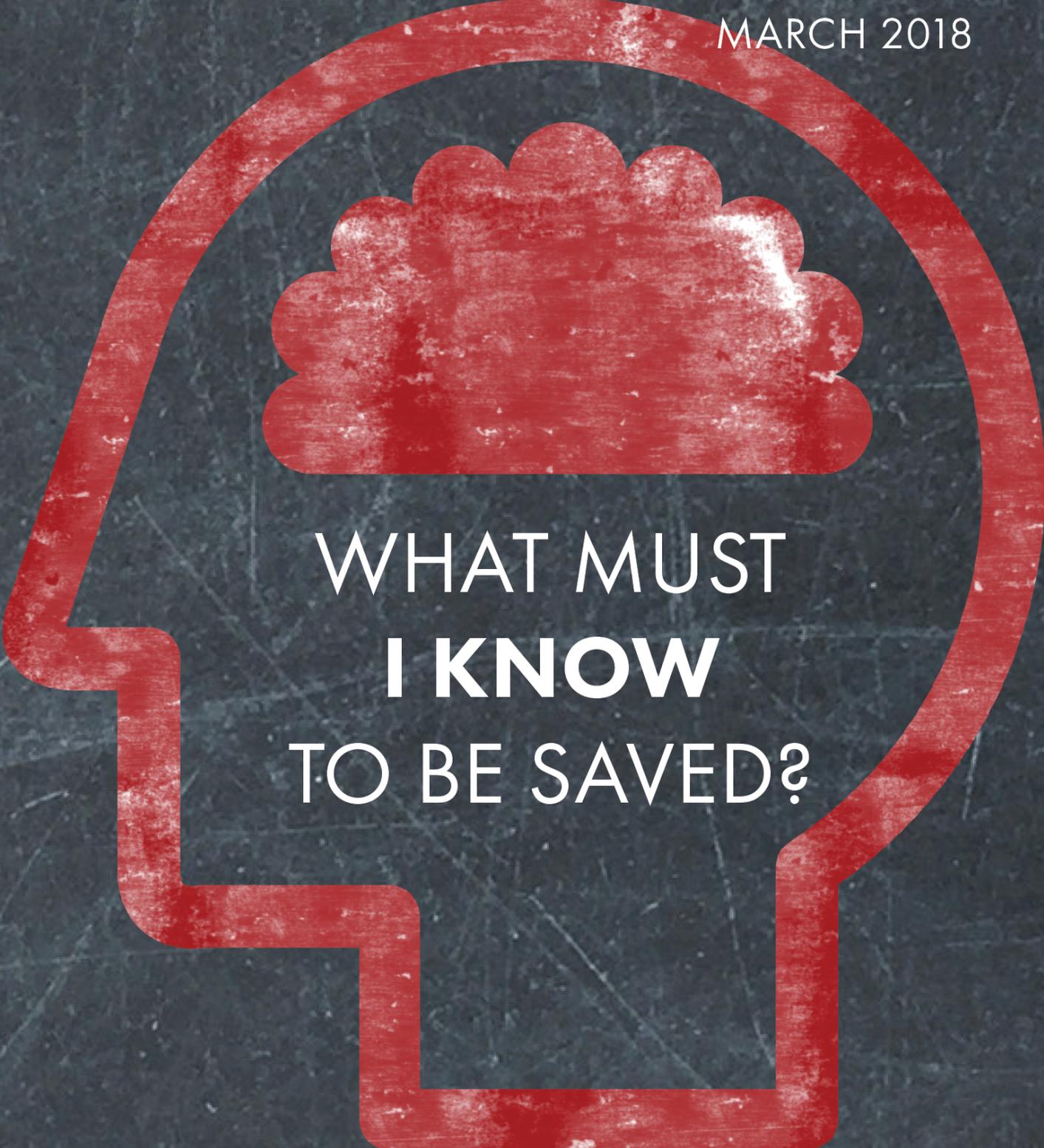


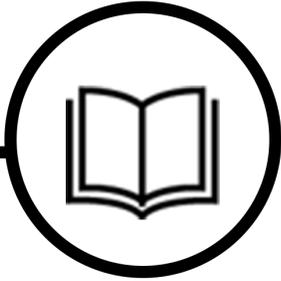
PERSPECTIVE

MARCH 2018



WHAT MUST
I KNOW
TO BE SAVED?

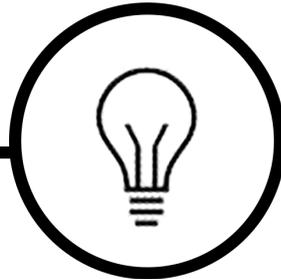
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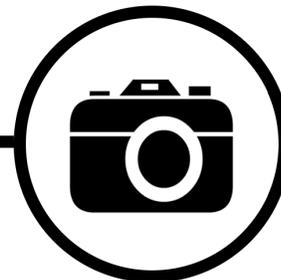


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“What Must I Know To Be Saved?”

We long for eyes of the hearts of our neighbors to be enlightened (Eph. 1:18). We want them not just to hear the good news, but to believe it. It's the desire of every true Christian to see his friends and family put their faith in this gospel message. The gospel is a message that must be communicated. It has content. There are historic facts to be understood. Christianity is not a warm feeling, it is a historic truth. The gospel is a matter of knowledge. As Paul wrote toward the end of his majestic letter to the Romans, “I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all *knowledge* and able to instruct one another.”

We have never had more access to knowledge than we do today. Your smartphone is a reference librarian bringing the World Wide Web to your fingertips. Curious about the hypostatic union? Just Google it. Looking for a definition of penal substitutionary atonement? Just ask Siri (it works, I tried).

All this information can be overwhelming, and explains why someone might ask, “What must I *know* to be saved?” or, more precisely, “What, *exactly*, must I know to be sure I have eternal life?” Clearly, we must know something. John Murray rightly taught, “there is a knowledge that is indispensable to faith.”¹ But what “knowledge,” and just how much knowledge is required?

A BAD QUESTION?

Should we even be asking such a question? As in all of life, motives matter. Your goal should not be to affirm the least amount of doctrinal truth you need to get to heaven. Instead, aim to maximize the amount of truth you know. “Give me understanding,” prayed David, “that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart” (Psa. 119:34).

Asking how little we have to know to be a Christian is a bit like asking how much we're allowed to sin and be a Christian. A person aspiring toward a tolerable level of rebellion is not a true believer. Likewise, someone hoping to believe as little as possible probably doesn't know the Lord.

J. Gresham Machen said he often got asked how little of the gospel one needed to accept in order to be saved. He refused to answer this question, though for a slightly

different reason. He insisted the question is unanswerable. “Who can presume to say for certain what is the condition of another man's soul; who can presume to say whether the other man's attitude towards Christ, which he can express but badly in words, is an attitude of saving faith or not?”²

Machen pinpointed a perennial pastoral problem. We have a faithful, loving church member who has Down's Syndrome. Years ago, the church welcomed him into fellowship. He sings as joyfully as anyone. He participates in Sunday School with fervor. He speaks as well as he can of Jesus in his heart, though he struggles to articulate the gospel in an understandable way. One can't be sure exactly how much he comprehends. But when you see him engaged in corporate worship, you can't help but be personally encouraged and challenged to love the Lord more. How much did this brother understand when he became a Christian? I presume Machen had cases like this in mind when he wrote, “This is one of the things which must surely be left to God.”³

A WORTHY QUESTION

As difficult or even impossible as it may be to answer the question of how much knowledge one must have in order to be a Christian, faithfulness demands we try. Jesus said entrance into the kingdom of God requires we repent and believe (Mark 1:15). It is not, therefore, unwise to ponder what, in fact, we must believe. And though this belief is more than intellectual adherence to sound doctrine, it is not less.

We are on shaky, unstable ground if we try to slice and dice the precise amount of theological doctrine required to enter the pearly gates. But the Bible is not silent about what one must believe in order to be a Christian. And what one must believe will surely impact how we speak to others as we endeavor to be “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20).

A BIBLICAL ANSWER

In Romans 9 Paul laid down the gauntlet on behalf of God's sovereignty. Salvation is in the hands of the Lord. He redeems as he sees fit, according to his will and with the ultimate end of bringing glory to his great name. The kindness of God that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4) is kindness because it is undeserved and unasked for until God's Spirit changes our desires. Our salvation does not rest upon our wisdom, works, or will. We are redeemed according to God's sovereign plan and purpose. Our faith does not save us; God saves us.

And yet, God does not save us apart from repentance and faith. Thus, in chapter 10, Paul lays down the gauntlet on the side of human responsibility. Whom does God save? Paul's answer is clear: "[I]f you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

You must know who Jesus is and what he's done. He's more than a rabbi, a carpenter, or a truth-seeker. He is Lord, and as Lord, he has authority over all things, including you. When the Holy Spirit enters a sinner's heart, that sinner is led to believe and profess Jesus is God over him. With this knowledge comes an awareness of one's own unworthiness and a sense of one's personal need. Someone who knows Jesus is Lord knows he or she is *not* Lord.

Peter's first sermon climaxed with a statement of Jesus's divine authority: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). And when the listeners understood who Jesus is, Luke tells us "they were cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). Knowing who Jesus is left them undone, aware of their sin, and wondering what they could do to be saved. Salvation requires knowing you need to be saved, and this requires the knowledge Jesus can save.

But a Christian knows more than the fact that Jesus is Lord. He knows "God raised him from the dead." This is a statement simple enough for a child to believe, and it requires a childlike faith to accept (Matt. 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17).

To be raised implies Jesus died, and to be a Christian one must believe he died for you. He is the answer to your problem. His death is the key to your salvation. One must understand his cross is your only hope.

John Calvin defined faith as "a firm and certain *knowledge* of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the *truth* of the freely given promise in Christ."⁴ What is God's "benevolence toward us" if not, at the very least, the knowledge Christ died and rose to save us? And what is the foundation of this knowledge if not the "truth" that his salvation rests in God's promise to save all who would turn and trust in him? Murray followed with a similar statement, "We must know who Christ is, what he has done, and what he is able to do. Otherwise faith would be blind conjecture at best and foolish mockery at the worst.

There must be apprehension of the truth respecting Christ."⁵

What is the *minimal* amount of doctrinal knowledge a person must have to be a Christian is a dangerous question to ask if one is trying to get out of believing the whole Bible. But if it is asked humbly, the answer is a sweet reminder, as the old adage goes, that the gospel is shallow enough for a child to wade in and deep enough for an adult to swim in. To be a Christian is to cling to Christ as sovereign Lord and risen Savior. In other words, it is to believe you are a sinner and his death and resurrection is the only answer to that heinous problem.

"WHATSOEVER GOD SAYS IN HIS WORD"

I want every Christian to realize he doesn't need a seminary education to share the gospel. I hope she has confidence in the Holy Spirit's power to save and, by God's grace, her own ability to share the gospel message. It is crucial he knows the simple truth God saves sinners through the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. This is a message we communicate.

This is why Charles Spurgeon undoubtedly enjoyed recounting the sermon God used to finally change his heart. The guest preacher at a Primitive Methodist church took Isaiah 45:22 as his text and urged a young Spurgeon to look to Christ. Speaking for the Savior, the simple preacher said:

Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood.
Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!

Of course, I want to say so much more than this when I evangelize! I want people to understand the Trinity, the importance of penal substitutionary atonement, the necessity of good works as a response to saving faith, and the inerrancy and authority of every word of the Bible. I'd talk about the Second Coming, the new heavens and new earth, and the need to be ready for the Day of Judgement.

Should someone profess faith in Christ and want to join Mount Vernon, we—like most churches—would require assent to these basic beliefs. Not because we are convinced all of them are *essential* for salvation, but because we aren't sure how we can affirm someone is a Christian who denies these Christian truths. True faith will lead you to affirm as much of God's truth as you

possibly can. Berkhof put it well, “The knowledge of faith consists in a positive recognition of the truth, in which man accepts as true whatsoever God says in His Word.”⁷

It is hard to say what, precisely, is the least one must believe in order to be a Christian. Nonetheless, it is never wrong to side with Paul: “[I]f you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

~Aaron Menikoff

¹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1955), 110.

² J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1937), 155.

³ Ibid. Berkhof actually said it is impossible to answer the question of “just how much knowledge is absolutely required in saving faith.” L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Fourth Ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1941), 504.

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Volume 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III. 2. 7. Italics added.

⁵ *Redemption Accomplished*, 110.

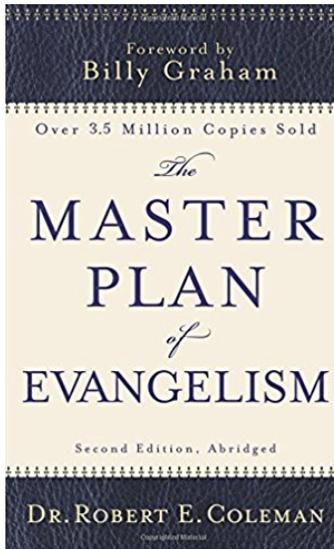
⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: Volume 1: The Early Years* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1962), 88.

⁷ *Systematic Theology*, 503.

The Master Plan of Evangelism

Written by Robert Coleman

Bookstall Price \$6



Robert Coleman wrote *The Master Plan of Evangelism* in 1963 as a response to the 20th-century pattern of result-driven evangelism programs in American churches and ministries. He sought to bring the focus back to the biblical example of Jesus and create a simple, reproducible model for teaching faithful evangelism in the church. Five decades later, we can still learn from Coleman's focus on simple gospel techniques found in the scriptures.

Coleman breaks his plan down into eight principles of Jesus' earthly ministry, all grounded in the gospel accounts of

Jesus life. These overlap and build on one another as the book progresses, but he concludes each chapter with applications for ministry today. In each chapter, he discusses how modern program-driven efforts have failed, and each principle from the life of Jesus creates a more effective, lasting ministry.

Contrary to the title, I found this book to be less about direct evangelism and more about discipleship. Coleman's focus is consistently on how we should lead other believers to know and love Jesus deeply and to share that love with those around them. In the same way that Jesus focused on individual men in his selection of the apostles, Coleman believes that focusing the bulk of our efforts on a few well-selected individuals (and then teaching them to do the same) will bear more lasting fruit than events or programs.

We can be thankful for the example of men like Robert Coleman who called Christians to a Bible-centered gospel message and practice. *The Master Plan of Evangelism* is a book that has called generations of Christians to follow in Christ's footsteps and teach others to do the same.

– REVIEWED BY B.J. KING

Excerpts From the Book

1

“One has to go to the New Testament, and the Gospels in particular, to really see the plan of Jesus. They are after all the only eyewitness accounts that we have of the Master at work. To be sure, the Gospels were written primarily to show us Christ, the Son of God, and that by faith we can have life in his name. But what we sometimes fail to realize is that the revelation of that life in Christ includes the way he lived and taught others to live.”

–Preface, p. 16

2

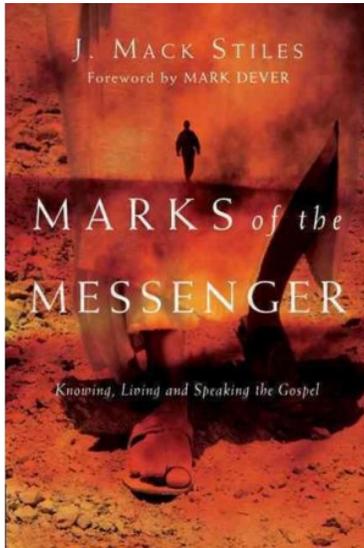
“When will we realize that evangelism is not done by something, but by someone? It is an expression of God's love, and God is a person. His nature, being personal, is only expressed through personality, first revealed fully in Christ, and now expressed through his Spirit in the lives of those yielded to him. Committees may help to organize and direct it... but the work itself is done by people reaching other people for Christ.”

–Reproduction, p. 108-109

Marks of the Messenger

Written by Mack Stiles

Bookstall Price \$15



In Mack Stiles' book, *Marks of the Messenger*, he guides us through essential aspects of a healthy evangelist. In this accessible and encouraging read, Stiles draws the reader in with examples from his life as an evangelist living in the Middle East and clearly lays out the marks of a healthy evangelist.

Stiles begins by unpacking the question of who we are meant to be spiritually. "We want to be people who present the gospel with care, knowing spiritual lives are at stake." Our desire should be to remain rooted in the gospel, concerned with

faithfully presenting Christ.

Stiles to continue also encourages us to grow in our knowledge of the gospel, resisting the urge to shape the gospel to our tastes or our culture. A healthy evangelist not only knows the gospel but lives a gospel-centered life, ensuring that "the message we bear looks like the message we share."

I especially appreciated Stiles' call to stay on guard against losing the gospel. This slow slide away from the truth of the gospel "leaves the message of the gospel unspoken and implicit. Assuming the gospel is a lazy forgetfulness that we are in battle." What a warning for us today! Are we assuming the gospel in our conversations, or is the gospel clear and evident? We should regularly preach the gospel to ourselves and not feel that we have outgrown it. Stiles leaves us with three foundational questions to continue to ask ourselves as we share the gospel: *Do I know the gospel? Do I live the gospel? Do I speak the gospel?*

This is an encouraging and instructive book on evangelism. It is a quick read but a resource I know I will find myself looking back through. Stiles speaks from a wealth of experience that is helpful to all Christians and hones in on what it looks like to be a healthy evangelist. If you are looking for a primer on evangelism, I highly recommend this book.

– REVIEWED BY LIZ FREEMON

Excerpts From the Book

1

"We must never forget that the best thing that can happen for anyone is to know the living God."

– *Messengers in a Troubled World*, p. 64

2

"People don't come to faith because of the excellence of our presentation or because we provided the perfect circumstance. People come to genuine faith because God draws them. This guards us from thinking that we can manufacture conversions[.]"

– *Waiving the Flag*, p. 77

3

"Healthy evangelism is cultivated by exposing our faith to others, by anticipating how to be bold in our conversations and by being willing to invite a response to the message."

– *Be Bold*, p. 89

NEW MEMBERS



Rachel Cochran



Kayci Dennis



Caitlin & Evan
Harrison



Susan & Sunil
John
(Yohann & Zach)



Jung Hyun (Andy)
Kim & Sinae Seo



Ajay & Diana
Reddy
(Nehemiah, Diya,
Ezra, Hesed)



Tiffany Seto



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH