



“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship

Santification: God Working His Will In Our Lives

Plus:

Kathleen Hart Talks to New Hope Women

New Hope Members Play Theater Critics

God's Grace Verses Our Works

One Man's Unity Creed

From Pastor Dennis

We've All Seen It

"Apostasy or abandoning one's faith often begins with our unwillingness to be thankful. Each of us can choose to be thankful or choose to be critical and bitter. We've all seen it.

"The drift from God begins with an unwillingness to give thanks to God - to choose to look at what is not, rather than what is; to complain about what should be, rather than what God has given. It's a slow slide, but it is a slide - and before long the ungrateful one becomes the one who has turned his back on God, bitter that he 'tried God,' but God didn't deliver.

"He laments his lot, thinking that his cup is half empty, when he could be giving thanks that by God's grace his cup is half full." (From *Living On the Mountain* by Roger C. Palms, Revell Pub., 1986)

Here are Paul's last words of advice to Timothy - 2 Timothy 3:1-5 - "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them."

Notice that Paul mentions "ungrateful" in the same breath as "unholy." Could it be that when we become ungrateful and unthankful, which is sin, that we are led to more sin, such as pride?

We've all seen it - an excited and inspired Christian who is actively involved for years in service to his/her Lord and the local church. And then he/she begins to think they deserve more recognition, more appreciation, more compensation, more prestige, etc. They begin to feel that they have been cheated out of something, or are missing out on something. They find other people to commiserate with and they and their "group" end up leaving the church in bitterness.

It's like what happened to Adam and Eve. They were in the Garden of Eden, a virtual Paradise. They had everything they needed and almost everything they wanted. God said they

could eat of every tree but one. There must have been dozens, perhaps hundreds of fruit and vegetable-bearing trees and bushes in the Garden - an extensive "menu" to choose from, but Satan influenced Adam and Eve to obsess about that one tree from which God did not want them to eat.

And God told them not to eat of that tree for their own good. But Adam and Eve found pride and wanted more power. They began to doubt and distrust God and thought they were missing out; that God was surely keeping the best things from them. They sinned and had to leave Paradise. They were ungrateful and unholy. Instead of praising God and being thankful for the multitude of blessings throughout the Garden of Eden, the most beautiful place on earth, they became critical and gave up Paradise.

Some use the acronym, ACTS, to remind themselves how to pray and what to pray for. A is for adoration, C is for confession, T is for thanksgiving, and S is for supplication. Often our prayer time can turn into an extensive "wish list" of things we want God to give us. Let us daily praise God for all He is and thank him for all the abundant blessings He gives us - John 1:16 - "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."

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The Vine *Growing Together in Christ*



STAFF BOX

John Siston	Editor
Mary Terry	Associate Editor
Dennis Pelley	Pastoral Advisor
You!	Contributions

Send articles or other contributions to John Siston: john@travelgallery.com
or Mary Terry: 1508 W. Huntington Dr.
Alhambra, CA 91801 (626) 308-2961
mistyt92536@yahoo.com

Preaching The Gospel

Romans: Part Four - Sanctification

We have already described humanity's great need for God's forgiveness and redemption.

All have fallen far short of the glory of God and deserve to be condemned. None can save themselves through their own righteousness or good intentions. Justification is a decree from God that makes a person righteous in His sight. Those who are justified sense that they must now live their lives differently (Rom. 6:4).

Sanctification is nothing more than living one's life in the light of God's mercy. Some people live only a short time after coming to faith, such as the thief on the cross who died the same day of his conversion. Others live very long lives in the faith. Nevertheless, the sanctification process is one and the same. It is a new life, a transformed life, lived with a new purpose - that of glorifying God. This shift in focus changes everything! The old sense of condemnation that kept us anxious, alone and afraid is replaced with the freedom to live in a whole new way. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin & death" (Rom. 8:1-2).

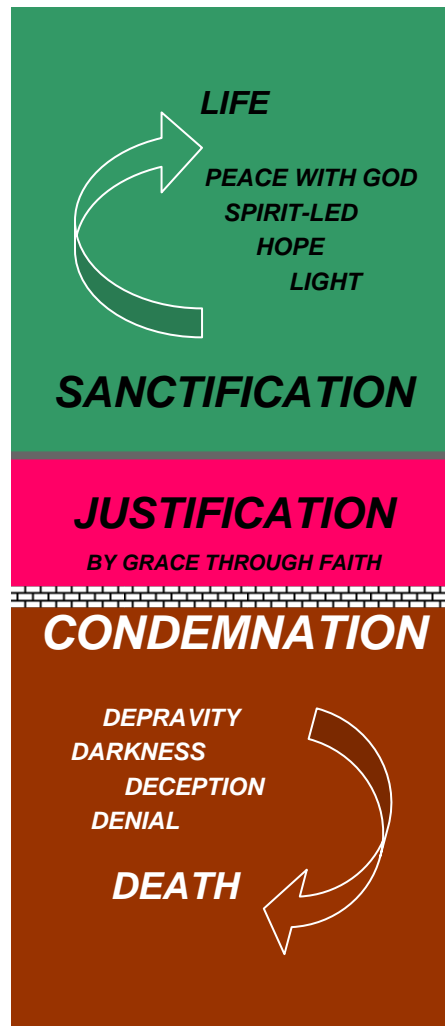
Unlike justification, which is a one-time decree, sanctification is a life-long process. It is not added to make up for something justification lacks. Instead, sanctification is the natural result of justification. One who has been forgiven of all their sins (past, present and future), who has been adopted as a child of the living God, who is led by His Spirit, and who possesses the sure hope of future glorification cannot simply go on with life as usual (Rom. 8:29-31).

Everything changes, although not all at once. That's what makes it a process. We need time to change our belief systems as the Holy Spirit gradually pries us away from our old thoughts and habits. Even though the redemption of our souls was fully completed at justification, nevertheless, the transformation of our hearts and minds will take the rest of our lives. It is a

difficult and often painful process as we begin to see the many sins we harbor. One by one we repent of them, as we understand how much better it is to cling to Jesus and walk in His ways. We sin many times during this process, however, each time the Spirit skillfully convicts us, leads us

to repentance, and assures us that the blood of Christ is enough. We never fall back into condemnation again because it was not our effort that saved us in the first place. Jesus paid for all of our future sins as well as those we committed in the past. Therefore, we are motivated to get up and try again to live up to our calling as children of God. Not out of fear of condemnation, but rather out of gratitude for His forgiveness.

Sanctification does not "qualify" us or somehow make our salvation more certain. Jesus has already done everything that was necessary for our redemption. We add nothing to it through our own works. All we can do is to glorify Him by following the lead of the Spirit daily and honor Him by maturing in the faith He has given us. The final outcome of the sanctified life is to be found in eternal glorification. This will be the topic of the next article.
- By Dr. Sandy Blank



Sanctification: Up Close and Personal:

I was reading Philippians 2:12 recently where Paul tells the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." In times past I was left with the impression that there was a set list of things I needed to be doing for salvation. Much of it centred on keeping the commandments. Now I'm seeing things differently.

In Phil. 1:6 Paul writes, "being confident of this very thing [their fellowship in the gospel] that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ". God started His work and He will see it through. Father God has called me from condemnation and has justified me through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

See Personal On Page 4

God Working in Our Lives

No Instant Spiritual Transformation

"Lord, give me patience and give it to me now!" This prayer-joke is usually said in jest, but is more and more becoming a truism in our instant gratification, microwave world. Few are willing to wait for anything these days. Dinners aren't home cooked anymore - who wants to wait on the oven? Drivers don't have time to stick to the speed limit. Young people can't wait to grow up, and as Christians, we often find it difficult to wait to become spiritually mature as well.

Transformation is a process, not a quick fix. Romans 12:2 tells us not to be conformed to the world, but to let ourselves be transformed by the renewing of our minds, or as the New Living Translation puts it, "Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."

Even though we can be quick to change our minds about something such as the type of sandwich to eat, wrong ways of thinking become ingrained and not easy to change. Legalism, for example, is a way of thinking that goes deep into the heart and mind. It's also subtle and deceptive. A person with this mindset is often not even aware of the ways legalism can warp one's attitudes and perception of the world.

One of the worst effects of legalism is self-righteousness, which makes a person believe they don't need much transformation. It can also have the equally devastating effect of discouragement, which leads people to give up because they'll never be good enough. Both of these mindsets can inhibit God's work of transforming us into spirit-led, mature Christians.

As I've discovered in my short time on earth, letting God change the way I think isn't so easy. I can't say I haven't made some progress, at least I hope so. (How does God measure this kind of progress? I believe we shouldn't try.)

No, it seems it may take a lifetime, and even then, I'm sure I'll feel I need more time for God to work on me. Paul expressed these thoughts well in Philippians 3. He realized all his law-keeping hadn't made him perfect. He understood he was a work in progress through God's grace, but he wasn't worried about it. Like Paul, we can't

think about how much more there is to do. We can only keep going, putting the past behind and pressing forward to the goal.



Paul likened life to running a race (1 Cor. 9:24). In Heb. 12:2, we are told to run the race with endurance, which would indicate we are in a marathon, rather than a sprint. I've never run in a marathon (I don't like running at all), but anyone who has can tell you the key is just to keep going.

With God's help, we can, slowly & steadily, keep letting him change us, even though it will take a lifetime. If we trust our hearts and minds to the One who gives us the desire to obey him and the power to please him (Phil. 2:13, NLT), he will continue to change the way we think and give us the prize, regardless of the progress we think we may or may not have made. - *By Tammy Tkach*



Personal From Page 3

Now a relationship of trust and faith in Him is birthed and my journey begins as a Spirit led child of God.

What then does Paul mean when he writes, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"? Is Paul contradicting himself? Is this something I can accomplish? Or do I try as hard as I can to do what I think God wants me to do? Do you just call on God when you need help? Does fear and trembling mean I could lose my salvation if I don't do the right things?

In verse 2:13 Paul writes, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." So, *God* is working out His will in my life and the life of all believers to act according to His good pleasure. We are to trust God to work out our salvation. He will do His good pleasure in our lives - and we don't always know all that pleases Him. But we trust in Him and look to Him. God's grace fills us with awe and wonder and assurance of His presence in our lives.

"Fear and trembling" is not a fear that I am going to fail. God began His work of salvation in me and He will see it through to the end. He will never leave me or forsake me. My response to the work He is doing in my life and in the lives of all believers fills me with awe and reverence of who He is - merciful, loving, holy, righteous, long suffering, all powerful, sovereign God. His precious gift of grace - Jesus - fills me like waters rushing over a waterfall in springtime thaw.

As God gives me the assurance of salvation in my life journey with Him, I'm seeing it doesn't come down to a list of do's and don'ts or some kind of formula. God's grace has changed me and is changing me as He works out His glorious will in my life. - *By Diane Siston*

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New Hope Happenings

Woman's Ministry Hosts Guest Speaker

Fifty women enjoyed a wonderful Saturday brunch on February 10th sponsored by *New Hope Christian Fellowship*. Women of all ages from surrounding Southern California churches joined ladies from our local church for a time of good food, wonderful fellowship and inspirational guidance. All who attended were enriched and enlightened by the special guest speaker, Kathleen Hart.

For those of you who do not know Kathleen I would like to give you a little background about who she is and her love for the Worldwide Church of God. Over eleven years ago she was asked by Tammy Tkach to speak to the minister's wives of our church. This was just as the major doctrinal changes were beginning to occur. When Tammy called and asked her to speak, Kathleen said yes. When she hung up the phone and her husband asked who had called she explained and he said, "but they are a cult." A couple of friends told her that it would not be good for her reputation to speak to us. She said I don't care, "I am going to go and tell them about Jesus." And she has been lovingly and powerfully sharing Jesus with women of our denomination ever since.

Kathleen is an especially gifted speaker. She touches you because she speaks with such honesty and shares her own struggles with being tempted to "walk in the flesh." But the truth that she shares with conviction is that victory is ours in every circumstance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Her opening remarks that day admonished us to "live with Jesus in every stage of our lives." Be aware of the different stages, youth, college, marriage, motherhood, working life, retirement and old age. Kathleen said that even under normal circumstances she feels that she only has one-eighth of her life left. Her desire is to make every moment she has left, count for Jesus. She



said that in every stage there will be good times, hard times, times of joy, times of sadness, good health and sickness. In any stage of life the "suddenlies" can come—those totally unexpected situations that can arise in a moment. We must be willing to adjust to the changes and suddenlies of life and everything we do should be done to the glory of God.

Two of her main points were: (1) Jesus loves us with an everlasting, never changing and unending love. (2) Receive His love and share it. She left us all with the words from an old hymn which is her theme song for this year and she asked us to make it ours.

*Moment by moment I'm kept in His love,
Moment by moment I've life from above,
Looking to Jesus 'til glory doth shine,
Moment by moment Oh, Lord I am Thine.*

- By Norva Kelly

Members Review Black History Play



On Saturday, February 17, 2007 NHCF sponsored ten of our members to attend "*Paul Robeson: The Man*" at PCC's Sexson Auditorium. In conjunction with Black History month and our focus on

Reconciliation in February, the play was a live enactment of the life of Paul Robeson, multi-lingual American actor, athlete, concert singer, writer, civil rights activist, Spingarn Medal winner, and Lenin Peace Prize laureate.

Attending the play were Fred Stevens, Alex Stevens, Lola Fyles, Lonnie Fyles III, Kerry Ledbetter, Collin Ledbetter & Cody Ledbetter, David Leon, & Daniel Leon, Ian Lacy, Bianca Williams, & her friend, Laura.

Below are some of their comments:

I enjoyed Paul's explanation of his dad sitting in the bleachers and rooting for the football team. - *Fred Stevens*

I liked the part when the football second-string quarterback got hit and Paul getting on the team was the part I could relate the most. - *Alex Stevens*

When he told the audience how his father had told him to never show fear, reminded me of how my own father has given me similar life lessons. In general, the way he received his father resonates with me because I too look up to my father in that way.

I think the best part of the play was the scene where he was on trial and being accused of being a communist. The fact that he refused to be subjugated or answer inappropriate questions inspired me because he refused to compromise his strength and morality. I thought that his reading of his statement amidst the judge's banging gavel was especially powerful.

- *David Leon*

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Comments From Page 5

There are times in my life that I feel separated from others because I am white. I mostly feel this way in my son's school. (There) are very few Caucasians in their school. It's very hard to adjust. I feel they judge us by how we look and our names. I feel Paul Robeson was treated the same by having to prove himself.

Discrimination is a sad thing. I will never be able to understand slavery and how another human could feel that they had the right to enslave and hold captive another human being.
- *Kerry Ledbetter*

People treated Paul Robeson differently. Kids in school make fun of me and nobody else. Sometimes they call me 'white trash.' The best part of the play was when he went to the President about the lynching and he shook his finger at the President. I thought that was a bold move and it was funny. - *Collin Ledbetter*

I could most relate to the part about racism. We mainly feel that Hispanics and African-Americans still don't get the respect that we should. Sometimes we even have to work harder. - *Bianca Williams and Laura*

I know what it feels like to apply for a position and not get it. I have been in situations where positions have been offered to white girls who didn't want it. I would take the position and strive. I needed the money, and opportunities and doors opened for me that may not have, had I not had the experience.

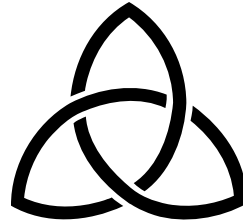
I admired his will to continue to make "A's" in college, even though he was faced with so many obstacles, of being put down on the college campus, always being picked on and even sometimes hurt till he was bleeding and put in the hospital while playing football. He could have quit the team. He just got out there and ran faster. - *Lola Fyles*

A great big thank-you NHCF for making this possible.



One Man's Unity Creed

I believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each a distinct individual yet living in a relationship of such unity - actively, dynamically, joyously and harmoniously involved in each other's existence in gracious self-giving love - that it can only be said they are One. I believe this wonderful relationship of unity becomes the pattern for all things.



I believe that God, in this Triune relationship of unity, planned before the foundation of the world to create us as other distinct individuals - as men and women with freedom of choice - to share in their God-life. To do this God purposed that in the person of Jesus he would become God with us so that we might come to know the Father's love, be saved from our sins and be saved for relationship - fellowship, participation and communion - with God.

I believe that God the Father created all that is - including us - through his eternally begotten Son, Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe that man and woman chose to know evil by experience and in so doing lost the knowledge of the Father's love for them and for all humankind. I believe at the appointed time God the Father sent his eternally begotten Son, Jesus, to become God incarnate never to become dis-incarnate, God in the flesh, "God with us" to show us the Father's love for us, forgive our sins, mediate a relationship between the Father and us and with his bodily Ascension into heaven become "Man with God." I further believe that Jesus raised us up with him and that we are now included within the circle of all that is God as his adopted children bringing us into a relationship of unity with God.

I believe in Jesus Christ the beloved Son of the Father fully God and fully man. I believe that through him I have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in fellowship, participation and communion with God and with all believers.

I believe it is God's will that we who consider ourselves Jesus' disciples come to the complete and perfect unity with God and with each other that Jesus prayed to the Father for in John 17:20-23 - a unity that is just as God the Father and Jesus live in complete unity.

Lord, I believe; please help my unbelief and please make our complete unity so.

- *By Tony Murphy from his website*

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God's Word in a High Tech World

PodCasts

In the last couple years, a remarkable new technology called "podcasting" (aka "God-casting" when listening to religious programming) has become available to give you one stop shopping to listen to a veritable plethora of valuable programs. If you can get on the Internet, you can listen to podcasts.

What is a podcast? A podcast is simply a radio-style show broadcast through the Internet. The nice thing about a podcast is that the shows can be saved and listened to anytime. And many podcasts are free.

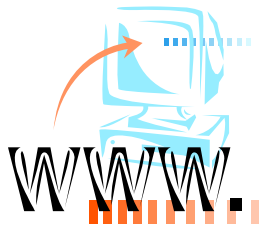
How do I play podcasts? You will need a computer, an Internet connection, and a free program to download podcasts from the Internet to your computer (also known as a podcatcher).

The easiest podcatcher to use is your browser - Internet Explorer 7 or Firefox 2.0. Both allow you to click on a podcast to listen to shows. The most popular podcatcher is Apple's iTunes. You can download it at: www.apple.com/itunes/download It is easy to use, and you do not have to own an iPod to use it. Another popular podcatcher is called Juice. You can download it at: <http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net> This is the one I use most of the time. If you don't want to download software, Yahoo and Google (two popular websites) will let you track podcasts if you have a free account with them.

How do I find and download podcasts? The programs above come with a decent directory and search facilities to find the most popular podcasts. Other good podcast directories for Christian programs can be found at www.podcastalley.com or www.podcastdirectory.com

Many websites today have podcasts. If you see one with the word "podcast" there is an excellent chance you've found one. Right-clicking on the link and selecting "Copy Shortcut" or "Copy Link Location" will allow you to add this to your podcatcher.

A normal click on the link will usually cause your browser to ask you if you want to subscribe to the podcast through your browser. Once you've selected a couple podcasts you'd like to



listen to, you can just click and listen. When the podcaster has put out a new program, it will automatically be found and downloaded to your podcatcher the next time you start it - no more checking lots of different websites to see if something new is there.

Today our local congregation now offers podcasts of the sermons most weeks. Just go to www.newhope4all.org, click on the "Listen to Sermons Online" link. You can listen right there, or if you'd like to have the sermons automatically downloaded to your computer, there is a link to subscribe, learn and enjoy!

Another great resource this time of year is a daily Lenten devotion from the Lutheran Hour you can subscribe to at:

<http://www.lhm.org/podcasts/step3-lenten.htm>

If you'd like more great examples of what's available, come see me. Or if you have questions about this article let me know.

In a future article, I'll tell you how to take podcasts from your computer anywhere you want to listen with a simple MP3 player. Until then, find a few good programs and enjoy. - *By Robert Meade*



My Philosophy Of Housecleaning!

I don't do windows because I love birds and don't want one to run into a clean window and get hurt.

I don't wax floors because I am terrified a guest will slip and get hurt then I'll feel terrible (plus they may sue me.)

I don't mind the dust bunnies because they are very good company, I have named most of them, and they agree with everything I say.

I don't disturb cobwebs because I want every creature to have a home of their own.

I don't Spring Clean because I love all the seasons and don't want the others to get jealous.

Remember: a clean house is a sign of a broken computer.

-Submitted by Marcella Houston



New Hope Theme - God's Grace



God's Grace Verses Our Works (Part 2)

As you know, our church theme for 2007 is "Saved by Grace" with Eph.2:8-9 as our theme scripture, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

In last month's article, we talked about how the vast majority of the unchurched believe that most of the "good" people aren't necessarily religious or avid churchgoers. They also believe that being "good" in this life will impress God and then he will reward us for our good deeds after we die.

While this initially sounds really plausible on the surface, we raised a couple of disturbing questions in the article such as: "How good is good enough to please God?" "Does anyone know what God's standard for goodness is?" And "Does God grade on some kind of curve with Mother Teresa as part of that curve?"

Finally we ended up with this comment. "As shocking as it sounds, there was one major religious figure who didn't believe that 'good' people go to heaven. Do you know who that was?"

The correct answer is Jesus Christ!! You might ask, "How is this possible?"

Well, let's look at what Jesus actually taught. Now, when it came to keeping the OT law, the Pharisees were the best people around. They were the professional do-gooders. Not only did they keep the law that was given by Moses (the big 10 as well as another 603 laws described in Leviticus and Deuteronomy), they literally kept hundreds of additional laws to ensure that they didn't accidentally break one of Moses' laws.

They prided themselves as being the most righteous people on the face of the earth bar none. Yet Jesus declared in his Sermon on the Mount that even the Pharisees were not good enough to be in heaven with God. "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will

certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

Can you imagine how irritated these professional do-gooders were when Jesus made this statement? Basically, Jesus was saying to the Pharisees, "As good as you are, you aren't good enough to please God." Now when the common people who heard Jesus' message weren't irritated, they were depressed. They didn't have the time or the energy to be as good as the Pharisees were, let alone to exceed them. They had jobs to do, kids to raise, families to please, etc. If the Pharisees weren't good enough then they didn't have a prayer of a chance.

Now you can ask the person you've been talking to this question: "What about you?" If Jesus was right then none of us are good enough. Most of us have broken almost all of the 10 Commandments hundreds of times. You can tell them that we all lie a little, we all cheat a little, we all covet a little.

You can also point out that Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount went on to re-define the

Mosaic Law in such a way as to make it impossible for anyone, including the Pharisees to keep it. For example, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matt. 5: 21-22). Jesus equated anger with murder. Who among us hasn't committed the sin of being angry?

Jesus also taught: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'" Everyone who heard him knew that law. "But I tell you that

anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28). If that is the standard of being good, then all the men stand guilty as charged.

So what's the point in all of this? If you're looking for a God who lets "good" people into heaven, his standards of goodness, as revealed by Jesus are even higher than those found in the Old Testament Law.

But there's more to the story. There's another incident in the life of Jesus that we need to examine concerning who goes to heaven. It involves what Jesus told one of the thieves on the cross. It's not what you think Jesus would have said. - *By Larry Omasta* [To be continued]

***Can you
imagine how
irritated
these
professional
do-gooders
were when
Jesus made
this
statement?***