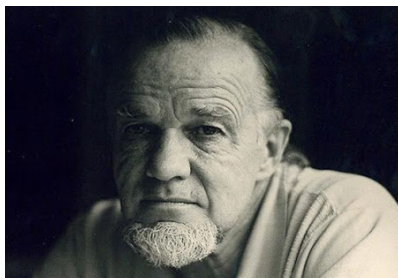


So What's the Problem

Jim Elliff



A well-known Christian philosopher, Francis Schaeffer, was asked this question: if you had only one hour on a train to tell someone about Christ, what would you do? He answered that he would spend forty-five minutes showing him the problem, and fifteen minutes showing him the solution.

Do you have a problem? Perhaps it is not so easy for you to see. If you have good relationships, have an enjoyable profession or make good grades, have a

family that loves you, and feel hope about the future, then you may not think there is anything to be fixed. But there is. Your problem is with God, and it is serious enough to cost you everything good for all of eternity.

You may not feel your problem right now. A man may be condemned as guilty and not feel guilty, just as a person might have cancer and not feel it or even know it. There is real or legal guilt and there is emotional guilt. But regardless of how you are experiencing your dilemma emotionally, God makes it clear that you have an insurmountable problem.

So what's the problem?

The Bible uses several words and phrases to help us understand. First, it says you are DEAD—not sick, not desperately sick, not sick to the point of death, but dead! The consequence of sin in each person is spiritual death, according to the Bible. “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). In fact, the Bible teaches that we are born as sinners (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:19).

God means that every person starts out spiritually as a walking dead man. He may be alive on the outside, but inside he is dead to God. Only Christ can make him alive. So the old story that says salvation is like a Christian throwing a lifeline out to a drowning man is not the truth. It is worse than you thought. You're not drowning; you're face down on the ocean floor!

Second, the Bible says you are BLIND. “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Just as a person in a cave cannot see his hand in front of him when there is no light, so you cannot see Christ without God shining his light on him (see 4:6). In a SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? world of sightless people, everyone imagines his own inward reality, but he cannot see the truth unless God gives him sight.

The Bible says that you are LOST. In Luke 15 Jesus described lostness by telling the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. There is nothing more hopeless than being lost. Like the man in a blinding snowstorm, every turn seems right for the moment, but all is futile.

The Bible also says that you are CONDEMNED. This means that you are under the judgment of God for your disobedience against him. “But whoever does not believe is condemned already” (John 3:18). God condemns every unbelieving person to hell, even if he or she is in the remotest part of the world. He is just in doing so, because unbelievers have sinned against whatever knowledge of God they have (see Romans 1).

What I am trying to say is that you do have a problem, and it is the type of problem that can only be solved with help from the outside. As a dead person you cannot make yourself alive; as a blind person you cannot give yourself sight; as a lost person you cannot find your way out; and as a condemned person you cannot absolve yourself from your actual guilt. You have a problem and you really don't have a solution unless it comes from someone else besides you.

Trying to overcome your problem on your own is a useless exercise. The most famous preacher of the 1700s, George Whitefield, once said, “What! Get to heaven on your own strength? Why, you might as well try to climb to the moon on a rope of sand!”

You simply cannot accomplish what God requires.

How does God solve your problem? First, he sets his heart on you from eternity past. Think about that! What an exciting thing to know that God has forever loved people just like you. “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3).

Next, he sends his Son, Jesus Christ, to cover the cost of your sins by dying on the cross in your place. “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). In Christ's death the full payment for all the sins of all who come to him are fully met. In this way God's justice is satisfied and you are pardoned. This is why Christ is called the Savior, or the Rescuer.

Finally, he pursues you by his Spirit, convicting you of your sinfulness, teaching you about the nature of salvation, and drawing you to Christ's beauty and worthiness (see John 16:9-11; John 6:44, 45). Christ becomes irresistible to you. The Bible teaches that even the faith you exercise is a gift from him (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

You have a problem and God has the solution—the only solution.

The people who have experienced this solution are called believers. They believe that God has loved them from eternity past. They believe that the payment of Christ on the cross for sins was for them. They find Christ irresistible, and following him the greatest privilege of all. They have faith in Christ and what he has done for them. They trust Christ, looking outside of themselves to him alone. They believe.

This is a chapter from *Pursuing God* by Jim Elliff.

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