



Meet the Woman Who Saved Herself



I used to know a woman named Betty Babcock. (This is not her real name. Her real name is Mildred Karloff, but I wish to protect her identity.) Betty presents a classic study of religious pride, making her an apt subject of this newsletter.

As long as I knew her (she is currently serving a ten-year sentence for crimes of a drug-dealing variety), Betty wore plain dresses, kept her hair in a bun (a whole wheat, gluten-free bun), and attended the I Love Jesus Church of Holy Good Habits and Flat Shoes. Betty believed that with proper application of faith, concentration, prayer, sincerity, Bible reading, face cream, chocolate chip cookies, meth, fish oil, and contemporary Christian music, any person could come within a hairpin's breadth of a sinless life. If there were trading cards for saints, you could trade two Peters for a Betty.

(Why the shocked look? Betty would have died with her Lord "before the cock crowed once, even," she told me.

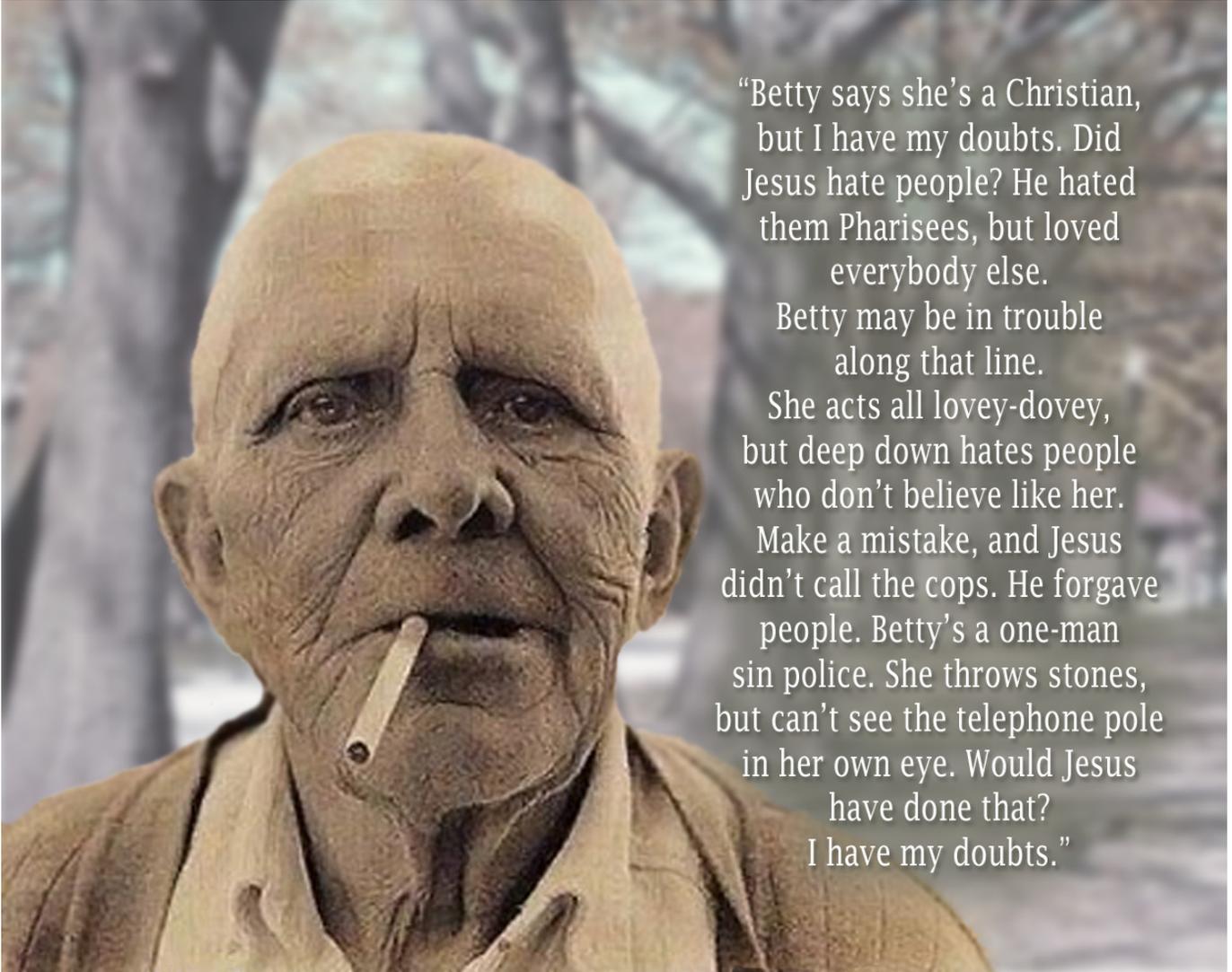
I will also never forget her saying: "Believe me, Martin, I never would have eaten that apple in the Garden of Eden. God said it was a sin, so I wouldn't have done it. Case dismissed. I would have said to the Devil, 'Flee from me, Devil!' and he would have hightailed it to the hills like a scared goose.")

But Betty has a secret sin—in case you couldn't tell. Carl, Betty's husband of thirty years, admits that his wife always tried hard to keep her pride contained, "But she had so damn much of it, it couldn't help but ooze out. Let's be honest," said Carl. "If one of your decisions saved you from eternity in hell, how could you possibly not secretly treat others like worthless pieces of horse crap and never give them sex? I love my wife, I really do. But you'd think she could have worn high heels at least once in her life. Is that asking too much? Jesus."

Betty faces Jerusalem three times a day in the exercise yard and prays for Carl's salvation.

"Satan would have hightailed it to the hills like a scared goose."

Carl was referring to Betty's decision to accept Christ. Betty is proud because she mistakenly believes her decision saved her from sin. Instead of believing that Jesus bore her sins on the cross, Betty "knows" her sins would have haunted her into eternity unless she "found Christ" before she died. Betty says Jesus saved her. But how so, if this "salvation" fails without Betty's assistance? If Christ needs Betty's decision to validate His work, His work was insufficient. Did He save Betty at the cross, or didn't He?



“Betty says she’s a Christian, but I have my doubts. Did Jesus hate people? He hated them Pharisees, but loved everybody else. Betty may be in trouble along that line. She acts all lovey-dovey, but deep down hates people who don’t believe like her. Make a mistake, and Jesus didn’t call the cops. He forgave people. Betty’s a one-man sin police. She throws stones, but can’t see the telephone pole in her own eye. Would Jesus have done that? I have my doubts.”

Apparently (according to Betty’s doctrine), He did not save her, for Betty spent most of her life—according to her own testimony—“unsaved.” Apparently, Jesus only made it possible for Betty to save herself by accepting Him.

So you can see how monumentally important Betty’s decision is to her. Before her decision (and in spite of Christ’s work), she was damned. After it, she had delivered herself from sin. As a formula it would read:

- ▶ **Christ + nothing = nothing.**
- ▶ **Christ + Betty = everything.**

The vital and deciding factor: Betty. The day Betty saved herself became, for her, an annual holiday, better even than Christmas. Carl always managed to get away for a poker game that day.

Stupendous things

Rather than seeing salvation from sin as a gracious gift (ignore for a moment that most Christians call it that), saints like Betty think it’s an offer they wisely accepted. To hear them talk, they exercised what is known as their “free will.”

For those not theologically inclined, “free will” is a popular Christian doctrine which says that God controls everything on this planet except people. Free will means that some people can do stupendous things that others can’t manage. Free will separates the masses into two categories: “wise” and “stupid.” Free will means that those who accept Christ are wiser than those who reject Him. People who believe in free will talk humble, like “my salvation is nothing of myself,” but this is only a self-righteous front. What they really mean to say is: “I accepted Jesus; what’s *your* problem?”

I prefer two particular truths to the false tenet of free will: 1) “All are wanting of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and 2) “Not one is seeking out God” (Romans 3:11). These truths lump all humanity into the same bin of unbelief, where they will remain until Christ gives them faith. These truths put Betty in with Carl, and boy does she hate that. These truths take away Betty’s pride in hoisting some people to heaven while condemning others for “not making it.” These two truths flatten homemade halos by crediting whatever good there is about a person’s walk, including their belief, to God, and not to the person.

Only God can impart the faith to believe (Romans 12:3)

The flip side of realizing that God alone gives faith is the realization that a sinner’s disbelief isn’t his or her fault. There’s a despised teaching for you. Any teaching dismissing the “wise-stupid” concept won’t find its way onto statements of faith. Sinners must be stupid and Christians must be wise, or it takes all the fun out of believing. To most Christians, condemnation of others is an essential element of “feeling good” in Christ. If everyone eventually receives mercy (as Romans 11:32 clearly states they will), what is the point of loving Christ? Much of the Christian joy I have witnessed requires others to be missing it for eternity. Christians want good news, as long as it’s not *too* good. God forbid it should apply to sinners.

How can God reward a person who doesn’t do the good himself? Would God reward a person for something *He* did? This is common Christian thinking, with the common Christian answers being, 1) God can’t, and 2) God wouldn’t. So common Christian thinkers, thinking this way, must blame sinners for being so gosh-darned sinny. That’s the flip side. It has to work both ways. Again, forgive the logic of it all.

A) If Betty says, “a sinner’s condemnation is the sinner’s own fault,” she must then believe her own salvation is to her credit (in spite of how humble she talks).

B) If Betty says “my salvation is nothing of myself,” she must then believe a sinner’s disbelief is not the sinner’s fault (in spite of how she looks down her nose at him).

In public, many Christian men and women will say, “We are what we are by the grace of God.” But that, too, is a whitewashed front. Because, in private, they will hug their “personal” decision and draw joy from it. They and

their personal decision will “get a room,” where they will live and make love until the both of them appear at the great white throne and say, “Oops.”

Four-step hash

None of us wanted born into this vale of tears. I didn’t sign up for it. Nobody asked me if I wanted to come here, to this earth, into this body. (I do like my body, but I’m ready to trade it in.) Had anyone asked, I would have taken one look and said, “Vale? Tears? I think I’ll pass, thank you.” But God is God. Clay vessels and their inhabitants are the determination of the Deity, not the human. Since God is God and we are merely His creation, God must have made us this way purposely. And so He did (Romans



8:20). Unless our vessels are cracked and lacking, we can never know the grace that will employ these vessels (the glorified variety) in future work.

Regardless of what shoes a man or woman may wear, it is neither one’s responsibility to conquer sin. God would never leave such important work to a cracked pot. Sin is too hard and too big. *A human? Against sin?* Only a fool would consider it a fair fight. Sin gives God something to power through, not the befuddled, spiritual aspirant.

If you can rescue yourself from sin, then Christ suffered and died in vain. If you wish to dishonor the Savior, then go into a dark room and say repetitive prayers. When you emerge, promise to change for Him. Fool yourself that He banks on your promises, points you out to oth-

“Fool yourself that He banks on your promises, points you out to others, and arranges His plans on the back of your ability.”

ers, arranges His plans on the back of your ability, then throws up His hands when you fail to deliver. In short, try to rid your life of sin. You will effectually make hash of His work.

You can turn His work to hash with these four easy steps: 1) beg Him to accept you, 2) wrestle with your flesh, 3) bemoan your imperfections, and 4) despise your humanity.

We prefer Chevy trucks

“All avoid Him.” That’s Scripture (Romans 3:12), and it applies to everyone. Everyone avoids Christ. It’s universal. No one wants anything to do with anything so stupid as a man getting crucified for the sins of the world. We prefer Chevy trucks. Crucifixion is too weak, too ridiculous; we have hemi engines and nitrogen charged, twin-tube shocks. God purposely, however, chooses weak and stupid things, to disgrace the wise and the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). This is precisely the plan. Not everyone realizes this. Most people think God is trying and failing.

A man once said to me: “Look what happened to Jesus!” as if Calvary were a colossal flop, a disappointment.



I looked at the man’s car, his degree, his fine home, and said, “Yes, but look what happened to *you*.” He didn’t get it, and still hasn’t. It delights God to use foolish and stupid things (1 Corinthians 1:21). People make fun of the story of Noah’s ark. But guess what? The joke’s on them. It’s not a story, it’s a fact. God’s stupidity is wiser than Einstein. His weakness is stronger than our vaunted modes of transport, such as the Chevy Silverado.

It is only as God lifts the veil that anyone sees wisdom in the crucifixion of Christ, or a man in a boat with a zillion drooling animals. Someday we will be embarrassed that we ever drove Chevy trucks. That we actually felt smug in them will shame us even further.

Holy carrots

“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Christ saved us while we were still sinners; He did not save us after we had stopped sinning long enough to choose Him.

Christian “evangelists” have it backwards. They dangle the cross like a carrot and say, “This can be yours if only you can manage to quit sinning long enough to accomplish the most stupendous, un sinning, righteous thing a human being could possibly accomplish (that is, if only you can be smart enough to come down here and believe).” Then they have the gall to call this “grace.” I call it “being smart enough to manage a stupendous thing.”

On more wicked days, I call it McDonalds Grace: “We’ll give you the ‘free’ fries all right, but you’ve got to drag your sorry ass to our restaurant before midnight on the 31st, or the offer expires.” And yet it’s worse than this, because the fine print at the bottom of the coupon says: “And if you do not arrive here by then, for whatever reason, not only do we not give you the ‘free’ fries, but we deliver up your sorry ass to a competing chain that specializes in char-broiling.” Then there’s an asterisk after the word “char-broiling.” Locate the asterisk at the bottom of the bottom of the coupon and it reads, * “for eternity. Some restrictions apply. Rules may vary. See your local pastor for details.”

Christ saves, belief does not

Salvation isn’t an offer, it’s a fact. Is the crucifixion’s outcome so poor that it flunks facthood? Am I to transmute the consequential hours of Calvary into a mere offer? I won’t do it. Offers are for telephone solicitors. Those terrible hours at Calvary produced something as heavy and real as rock. This salvation was actual, not merely



"I guess next time you'll read the fine print, morons."

possible, else Christ did nothing.

The Scriptures say God is the Savior of all humanity (1 Timothy 4:10). It is only the Christian religion that has added the word "possible" before the word "Savior." God never added that. Unless He saves all humanity, He cannot be the Savior of all humanity. He has to *do* it in order to *be* it. And so logic once again rears its lovely head.

Founded on the bedrock of salvation, true evangelism reads this way: "Christ saved you, atop that hill. Because of Christ's cross, you, sir (or madam), stand before me saved, the condemnation of sin put away. This is not an offer, it's a fact. Now, what is your reaction to it?"

If it's God's time for it, the reaction will be belief. And it will be God Who will have given it. Personal belief is a reaction to salvation, not a cause of it. Otherwise, salvation is of personal belief rather than of Christ. All will eventually come to acclaim this work, to which the Scriptures have already attested. And who can acclaim it without believing it?

John the Baptist looked us in the eye when he named Jesus Christ the Lamb of God "Who is taking away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Now, did the Man complete this work or didn't He? I say He did.

So what's the problem?

Once sin has done its work, it is banished from the universe. With sin finally eradicated, all will rise to immortality with their Savior. What else would God do, seeing that His Son removed the barrier between humanity and God? Yet in God's purpose it will be "every man in his own order" (1 Corinthians 15:22-23).

Thank you for everything.

Thanks to all who have written to encourage and help me through my recent personal and public trial. I am more consciously dependent than ever upon my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and upon those employed by Him as His hands and heart, namely, *you*.

Many travel opportunities have arisen, and I will be telling you about these exciting prospects in the days to come. My desire is to write more, speak more, publish more, and travel more to promote the gospel of the grace of God, and to alert one and all concerning how close we are to the end of this wicked eon.

Thanks to all who have contributed to my needs, especially in the wake of recent events. You are all fellow-laborers with me. Maybe you are not in the trench, yourself, but you are keeping this particular soldier fed and armed. Without your help, the work stops. It is clearly God's intention to keep it going.

http://martinzender.com/donation_mz.htm

An especial thanks to Clyde Pilkington and his family, who have provided me not only a fine place to rest my head, but to enjoy fellowship, love, homecooked meals, good wine, and a remarkably motivating work environment.

We will all get through this eon together.

Feel free to either write or visit me at:

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Grace and peace,

Martin

