

## Article 3: Obstacles to Intimacy with God

Art Thomas

*Fowlerville Freedom Center*

**Y**ou have been lied to. I don't know whether or not you've believed the lie; but the lie is so widespread that you are bound to have heard it at some point. And chances are, if statistics are any indication, you've believed at least some measure of it. You be the judge.

At some point in history—about fifty or sixty years ago—somebody decided to redefine what it is to be a Christian. Maybe they honestly believed what they were saying—or maybe it was all a scheme to get more people into their church. God will be the judge of that; so we really don't need to figure it out.

Whatever the case, the lie did not originate with any human being. Rather, the source was Satan himself, and his lie has permeated the American church ever since. Strangely enough, America largely bought it. And then we started sending missionaries all over the world who believed the same lie. Now millions of people—even those who are genuinely dedicated to God—have a skewed idea of what it is to be a “Christian.”

The lie is that all you have to do to become a Christian is ask Jesus into your heart. Is your blood pressure rising? If that's how you came to believe, then it probably is. Sorry if this aggravates your health, but somebody has to tell you the truth.

The fact is, this false idea of how to receive salvation did not come from Jesus. It's not even in the Bible. In fact, it was never even a part of church history until about fifty or sixty years ago.

We like the idea because it makes our part really easy. We just believe Jesus died and rose again, and then we're in. Pretty cool, huh? Well, it sounds great; but it's no more “true” than if someone said all you need to get into Harvard is a T-shirt with the university's name on it. Just because you wear a shirt that says “Harvard” doesn't mean you go there—no matter how much money you spent on the shirt. And just because you call yourself a “Christian” doesn't mean you are one—even if you said that little prayer and started going to church.

Getting nervous?

The truth is that all through the New Testament of the Bible, salvation is not reserved for those who pray a prayer and go to Church meetings—it is for those who are presently being transformed and kept pure through a moment-by-moment relationship with Almighty God and His Church.

The very first word of Jesus' public ministry (according to Mark) was “Repent!” The core message of Jesus Christ is “change”—first of all “personal change,” followed by “world change.” The Truth is transformational; and if you are not being transformed, you don't know Him! Consider these words of Jesus:

**Matthew 7:21-23**—“Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as ‘Lord,’ but they still won’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. On judgment day many will tell me, ‘Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorized’ (NLT).

The centermost issue is that we know and obey God. That is Christianity. It doesn’t matter how many good deeds you do or nice things you say. It doesn’t matter what kind of prayer you pray. Christianity is not a matter of mere deeds, and it’s not a matter of mere belief. It’s a matter of knowing and obeying God, and the only way to do that is through Jesus Christ.

So if you want to be a real Christian, you need to choose to give yourself completely to God. Then you need to start seeking God through prayer. And as He reveals various things for you to do and be, simply obey.

### **ANY QUESTIONS?**

But what about that verse that says, “...if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, NIV)?

What about it? You know if your confession and belief are genuine or not. “Confessing and believing” are not the definition of Christianity; rather they are the rocket fuel that keeps our faith in motion.

If your confession that “Jesus is Lord” is genuine, then your lifestyle will line up with that confession. You’ll obey him. And if you truly believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, then you’ll start seeking to know Him because you believe He is a living Person. Again, salvation is a matter of knowing and obeying God.

So examine your own life. If you don’t know God, and if you don’t obey God, are you really saved?

### **SO MUCH FOR WARM FUZZIES...**

Lie number two: “God doesn’t hate anybody.” Did your stomach turn a little? It’s hard to swallow because the Bible says “God is love.” If God is love, then He must not be able to hate. Right?

Wrong. The truth is, God hates because He is love. I once heard a preacher say, “I love people, children, and babies; therefore I hate abortion. I hate because I love.”

Still having trouble with that one? Let’s read what the Bible has to say:

**Proverbs 6:16-19**—There are six things the LORD hates—no, seven things he detests: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord among brothers (NLT).

**Proverbs 11:20**—The LORD hates people with twisted hearts, but he delights in those who have integrity (NLT).

**Psalm 5:4-6**—*You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; **you hate all who do wrong.** You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors (NIV, emphasis added).*

God wants to know us because He loves us. And because He loves us, He hates anyone and anything that might stand in the way of our relationship.

According to the verses above, there are actions God hates and there are people God hates. The people who are hated are the ones who deceive, wound, murder, cause divisions in relationships, set bad examples through sinful actions, or otherwise prevent others from having a relationship with Him. And the actions that are hated are those that separate you as an individual from God. God hates any roadblock that keeps a person from their destiny of relationship with Him.

### **PUBLIC ENEMY #1**

During the Cold War, Leonard Ravenhill said that “America’s greatest enemy is not Russia; America’s number one enemy today is God Himself.” It’s still true today. It happened to the Israelites too.

**Isaiah 63:10**—*Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them (NIV).*

As long as our nation continues to act arrogantly and rebel against God, we will be His enemy. God loves America, but He also hates America for turning our back against Him. If that bothers you, you have a choice: you can decide I’m nothing more than a false prophet and reject this warning, or you can begin to weep and pray for our nation. Which option sounds more like what Jesus would do?

“But God loves us,” you say, “How can America be His enemy?” Remember, God tells us to love our enemies, and He wouldn’t ask us to do anything He can’t. God does love us, and that’s why it grieves Him so much when we choose to run and hide from Him by living our lives with no regard for Him.

Have you ever wondered why we’re supposed to love our enemies? If you love your enemies, then you rejoice when they repent. You embrace them when they come to faith in Jesus. You forgive them immediately. That’s how God is toward us. All America needs to do as a nation is repent toward God. He will forgive all who do. That’s why we need to fall on our faces and cry out to God for a mighty movement of His Kingdom in America.

It’s time for us to please the Holy Spirit by personally embracing a true relationship with God and spreading it throughout our nation. Only then can we be made holy by His presence in our lives. When the Holy Spirit comes, He convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment so that we can bring every unyielded part of us to the cross to die with Jesus.

A lot of people are afraid of the cross because they think the change they’ll receive is going to wreck their life. Guess what? The cross won’t wreck your life; it will wreck your death. The trouble is that we don’t usually see the

filthy lifestyle we currently have as being already dead. Living in sin is like living with a rotting corpse tied to your back. Put it on the cross through open confession and start living in freedom! Jesus came so that we might have REAL life!

Everyday you have the opportunity to encounter the Holy Spirit. And everyday you have an opportunity to bring more of your fallen nature to the cross so the Spirit can give you new life through His limitless power! The more we get the junk in our lives out of the way through the forgiveness of Jesus, and the more we allow the power of His Holy Spirit to restore us, the closer we come to God the Father.

### **OBSTACLES TO INTIMACY**

God hates the things in your life that separate you from Him. These can be addictions, bad habits, wrong attitudes, or other sinful choices. In his book, *Healing the Wounded Heart*, Thom Gardner defines this inner transformation as “removing obstacles to intimacy with God.”

God wants to have an intimate relationship with you in which the two of you get to be real friends. But the Bible is very clear about certain actions and lifestyles that stand in the way of that relationship. These things imprison a person.

***Galatians 5:19-25***—Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of anger, quarrels, conflicts, factions, envy, murder, drunkenness, wild partying, and things like that. I am telling you now, as I have told you in the past, that people who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit (ISV).

Suppose, a young couple was recently married, and the woman decided to pay off the price of her wedding dress on the night before the wedding. Her method, though, was a little unorthodox. In one night, she managed to gather the necessary money via the armed robbery of eight party stores.

The next day, the groom stands patiently at the altar and makes eye-contact with the bride at the back of the church. Down the aisle she comes in all her radiance until an unplanned addition to the wedding procession bursts through behind her.

Six S.W.A.T. team members bust down the big oak doors—two more rappel down from the balcony. The bride gets tackled halfway down the aisle.

As the scuffle ensues, the groom becomes furious. He still loves his fiancé, but her actions have made it impossible for them to have an intimate marriage. The young criminal is hauled off to jail to await her trial.

After several weeks, sentencing comes. Upon the undeniable testimony of more than sixteen security cameras, the bride is taken to prison for more years than the groom wants to think about.

Now let's examine the groom's condition. He hates the bars that separate him from his love. He hates the guards who refuse to let her go. He hates what she did that got her taken away from him. And even though he's still crazy about the woman he fell in love with, he hates what she has become. He hates her for going off on her own lawless rampage without any regard for how it would affect him.

The groom hates all these things because they have destroyed his plans for a wonderful marriage. They'll never get to be intimate because of all the obstacles placed between them by the wife's demented actions. Their only contact now is through a monitored telephone wire that connects one side of bulletproof glass with the other. This is no relationship at all!

God is very much like this groom. The groom didn't put the wife in prison—she did it to herself. And God doesn't lock us away as slaves to our evil desires and actions—we do it to ourselves and He simply allows it so that we'll perhaps come to an end of ourselves.

And when we choose to separate ourselves from God through sinful actions, we're pounced at the worst possible moment by demons who mess with our mind, emotions, decisions, and more. Suddenly we find ourselves locked away in a prison formed by our own sin. Our slavery is then maintained by demons who go to great lengths to keep us separated from the One who loves us most. And God hates every part of that process.

God hates the prison of sin. He hates the bars of pride that lock us in. He hates the demons who have toyed with our souls and now hold us captive in sin. He hates the actions and decisions we made to separate us from Him. And even though He has loved us since before we were created, He hates the person we've become. He hates that we would so boldly slap His face and treat His love like it is worthless.

Do you see why sin is an obstacle to intimacy? The issue is not that God is so ticked off at our disobedience that He joyfully throws us into a living hell. Rather, we do it to ourselves. God's commands do not exist to condemn us—they exist to protect us. God gave us the Law because of His mercy!

[NEXT ARTICLE: Freedom from Sin](#)