

'IS THE 'ALTAR CALL' SCRIPTURAL?'

By Dr. Hoyt W. Allen, Jr.

Bible History reveals that altars were at first constructed of earth, or a heap of stones. The primary purpose of the altar was for sacrifice. The altar was used as a means of bringing the blood of the sacrificed animal into contact with God. The altar was considered to be the temporary abode of God. Therefore, blood was poured on the altar. By the sacrifice of an animal the demands for the sinner in some way to appease the offended Lord was met. The priest administered at the altars in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

Altars in the church, which Christ established on the Day of Pentecost, are nowhere to be found. However, as man has attempted to improve on God's pattern time and again, he has done likewise in the realm of building an altar in the church building. Bishop Sixtus II, a Roman bishop, erected the first hewn stone altar in AD 257, then others have continued the construction of them.

For the Roman Catholic Church, the altar is essential. They believe that in the mass an actual, though bloodless, sacrifice is offered for sin. Many non-Catholic followers of Christ see no need for the altar because the perfect sacrifice (Jesus Christ) was once offered on Calvary's cross (1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2:24). When Christ, the perfect high priest, entered the Holy of Holies above, the Old Covenant was replaced by a new one. His one perfect sacrifice causes additional and continuing sacrifices unnecessary. "For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

The Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1 calls for Christians to "present their bodies a living sacrifice." This seems to go along with other New Testament teachings, which say that the Christian's body belongs to God (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Thus, the Christian is to constantly be using himself as a sacrifice to God.

Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), a young lawyer of upstate New York, set out on evangelistic tours, despite lack of college or theological training. He brought some revival methods into an ordered pattern which became known as the "new measures." They included such things as "unseasonable hours" of service, "protracted" (drawn out) meetings, the use of harsh and colloquial language, the specific naming of individuals in prayer and sermon, and also the "anxious seat". The "**anxious seat**" was also called the "**mourners bench**" or "**prayer altar**". His (her) heart is heavy with the guilt of sin. Thus, the sinner is anxious for salvation, mourns over his sins, and prays that God will forgive him. He stays there until he feels that he has "prayed through" to God and God then forgives him.

Sounds good, but the only thing is---**IT IS A MAN-MADE WAY TO SALVATION**. The modern day prayer altar is not found in the New Testament. In case anyone is interested (seemingly few are today), the Bible teaches that when people were brought under conviction because of their sins, they did not go to a man-made prayer altar and beg and plead for God to forgive them. In every case of conversion it is stated or implied that sinners believed that Jesus was the Christ, repented of their sins, confessed their faith to others, were baptized (immersed), and lived faithfully (see Acts 16:31; 17:30; 8:37; 2:38; 14:22).

There is **no reason anyone should have to go to an altar and plead** with Christ to do what He has already promised to do, which is to grant Salvation to all who will trust and obey. The big question is ---- **Have Y-O-U followed the New Testament way to be saved?** If not, why not do it before the sun goes down this very day?

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