

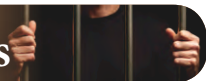
Echoes of Grace

Andre's Answers

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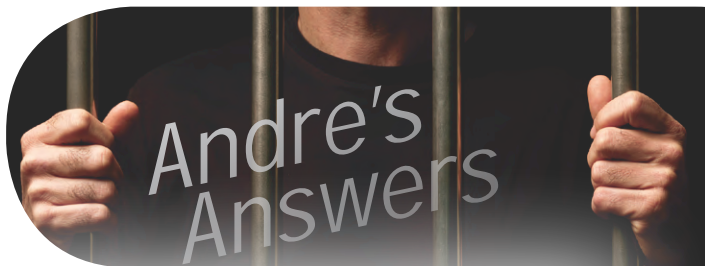
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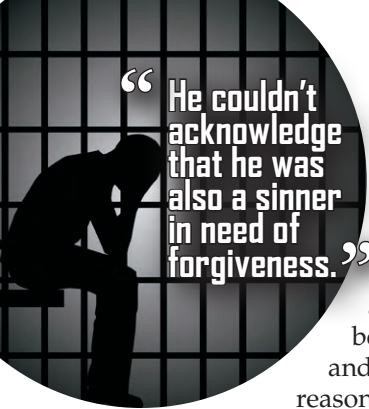
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Andre was one of the tough guys when I first met him. But he joined a few of the other men when I asked if anyone in the cell wanted to read the Bible together. Like many of the county jail inmates, he was awaiting trial and sentencing for the crime he had committed. I don't know the charges against the men unless they share their stories, and Andre hadn't shared his.

Week after week he came to the Bible sessions, and his attitude seemed to soften. He accepted some Bible study booklets to work on during the week, even completing the question sheet at the end of each lesson. As I took these home to read over, I began to see a puzzling set of answers.

One study booklet told the story of the "prodigal son" and his older brother. In this well-known Bible story, the younger brother asked for his inheritance money early and wasted it in sinful living. When he repented and returned home to his father, he was received with open arms, and they had a party. This made the self-righteous older brother upset. He didn't think such a sinner deserved forgive-



“He couldn’t acknowledge that he was also a sinner in need of forgiveness.”

ness and a joyful reunion with his father. He couldn’t acknowledge that he was also a sinner in need of forgiveness. When asked which brother he was like, Andre answered: “I feel I am the self-righteous brother, because I tend to minimize and justify my sins based on my reason for committing them. I don’t tend to acknowledge my sins.”

Are Honest Answers Good Enough?

The next questions were, *Have you ever considered what God thinks about you? Would He find you guilty? Have you ever accepted the Saviour He provided?* “I feel that [God] would be satisfied with who I am, for I am a fair and just man,” Andre wrote.

Andre’s answers were honest, but what would God think of them? Our natural thought is that our goodness will outweigh our “mistakes,” as in a balance scale. But to a holy God, sin is so awful that He cannot allow it into heaven. Sinners are headed to hell when they die, if they don’t take God’s free offer of salvation. **“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).**

After reading about the thieves who were cruci-

fied on either side of Jesus, Andre responded to these questions: *On which side of the cross do you stand? Do you take sides with the repentant man (thief) or with the others? Remember, there is no neutral ground.* "I stand on the same side as the repentant man. I truly believe that God is my Saviour," he wrote.

Andre was able to clearly describe who Jesus Christ is. "He is the Son of God; God in human form, a sinless man, born of a virgin who gave Himself for the sake of everyone." *Do you need to be saved from your sin?* was asked next. "Yes I do, in order to be saved from eternal damnation," Andre rightly stated.

Living Reality or a False Front?

About this time we read in the local newspaper of a violent crime that had taken place in our town. The police had arrested a man who, in order to be accepted by a gang, had stabbed someone he didn't know fifteen times, leaving him naked and bleeding. The victim survived and crawled to a house for help. This crime didn't seem to fit the mild mannered fellow that Andre now appeared to be, but I found out that it was indeed Andre!

Later on he told me that his "boss," the gang leader, was locked up himself and had counseled Andre to find God. I wasn't sure what this meant to either of them, since he'd told me that the gang's motto spoke of allegiance to "God, mother and gang."



Here was a young man who appeared to be close to salvation, yet his next written answer to the question, *Are you truly saved from your sin?* made my heart ache for Andre. “No, I’m not, although I can be. I have not made the decision to give myself fully to the Lord Jesus Christ.”

After a few more visits, Andre was gone. He was sentenced and sent to prison to serve time for this awful crime. I pray that he has by now made a clear decision to follow Jesus. Even in prison he can experience the freedom and acceptance that comes in knowing Him. **“If the Son therefore shall make you free, [you] shall be free indeed”** (John 8:36).

What About You?

The Bible tells about a jailer who asked his prisoner a question. The jailer had just heard two of the prisoners singing at midnight, even after he had beaten and chained them up. When a powerful earthquake shook the jail that night and everyone’s chains fell off, none of the prisoners ran away! The terrified jailer was amazed! These men had something he wanted, so he asked them, **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”** (Acts 16:30).

The Apostle Paul, one of the prisoners that night, gave a clear answer to the jailer: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and [you will] be saved”** (Acts 16:30-31). The jailer believed and was saved, and his family too.

You can become part of the family of God when you accept Jesus as your own Saviour. There is no

crime too bad to be forgiven. The same prisoner, Paul called himself the “chief of sinners.” If his sin-stained soul was washed clean by the blood of Jesus, yours can be too. “[You] are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).

People like Andre who know they need a Saviour but don’t act on that knowledge are in danger. Find out about that danger and the Saviour from it in *Tree-topper*.



Afraid of heights? Then I know a job that is not for you—a treetopper.

A treetopper is a man who straps long, steel spikes onto his boots, hangs a saw from his belt, and wraps a strong rope around the trunk of a tree. Then he shimmies up the tree by digging the spikes into the bark and flipping the rope up every few steps. Treetoppers sometimes climb to a height of 150 feet or more. Sounds dangerous? It is.

When the treetopper reaches the desired height, he starts chopping. In the old days, the cutting would be done with a sharp, two-bladed axe and a hand saw. Nowadays, the treetopper pulls on the starter rope of a lightweight chain saw to engage the engine and start the saw blade whirling.



First, the treetopper cuts a large v-shaped notch on one side of the tree. Next, using the saw, he makes a flat cut, beginning at the opposite side of the tree. As the flat cut gets close to the v-cut, the upper part of the tree starts to lean and fall over. At this point the treetopper yells as loud as he can, "**TIMBER!**"

The top part of the tree takes seconds to free fall through the air. This part of the tree might be 80 or 100 feet long. It hits the earth with a thunderous crash, making the ground shake. The falling part of the tree pushes the main part of the tree sideways, so that the treetopper, attached by his spikes and rope, sways violently back and forth for a few seconds.

Often, when the tree stops swaying, the treetopper takes a little break for a few minutes by sitting on the tree where the cut was made. He has a bird's eye view of the forest up there. Perhaps he feels for a few minutes like a king on an extremely high throne before climbing down.



Another Dangerous Perch

You may never have to climb a tree to a height of 150 feet to cut part of it down, but there is another great height from which everyone is in danger of falling that you need to know about. People that don't know the Lord Jesus as Saviour are in danger of falling from the heights of this world into the depths of a lost eternity!

This fall can't be measured in feet, but the enormity of the fall can be described in other ways. It is a fall from this world, where it's pleasant to enjoy the light, to the darkness of hell where the light of the wicked will be put out in everlasting darkness. It is a fall from a place where men and women can freely choose to turn their lives over to God, to a place where those who have rejected Christ will remain in the hardness of their hearts forever. It is a fall from this world where goodness, truth, and beauty abound, to the barren emptiness of hell where none of those things can be found. Hell is to be avoided at all costs! **"I say unto you My friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him"** (Luke 12:4-5).

Some people just seem cut out for doing dangerous jobs like tree-topping. But no one in their right

mind should continue to take the dangerous risk of being sent away to everlasting punishment. Everyone should realize the extreme danger of remaining in their sins and come to the Saviour of sinners to have those sins dealt with once and for all. **“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”** (1 Timothy 1:15).

The Lord Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the Saviour of sinners, because He was both Man and God in the same person. As Man, He could suffer death. And this is what He did when He let Himself be taken by cruel hands and be nailed to a cross of wood. His death has infinite power to cancel out His creatures' sins. Think of it! The Lord Jesus wanted you, and all others like you, to be with Him for eternity, so He willingly came to this earth and died for sinners! Oh the wonder and the marvel in the five words, **“Christ died for our sins”** (1 Corinthians 15:3)!

Because He died for sin, all who accept Him have their sins forgiven, and all may go to heaven. If your sins were a thousand times worse than they actually are, His blood that was shed on Calvary could still wash them away. **“The blood of Jesus Christ [God's] Son cleanseth us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7).

Look at it this way: The Lord Jesus left the glorious heights of heaven and came down to this sin-stained earth. His purpose? To bring sinners home to glory where they can be with Him forever.

Will you put your trust in Jesus Christ? **“I am not**

ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Romans 1:16).

Acting on God's offer of mercy is vitally important. Recognizing that we need that mercy is the first step toward receiving it. Read about it in *"I Could Have Freed a Thousand More!"*

"I Could Have Freed a Thousand More!"

"I freed a thousand slaves, and I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves," said Harriet Tubman, an Underground Railroad Conductor who led hundreds of slaves to freedom in the pre-Civil War days. This diminutive black woman, an ex-slave herself, would travel into the South, and then hiding by day and walking by night, she would lead groups of slaves to the North. Nineteen times she made the dangerous trek into the South and is credited with leading hundreds of slaves to freedom.






The reluctance to admit they were slaves kept many from seeking freedom. Today, the same thing is going on when the gospel is preached—people don't see their need of the Saviour to set them free.

Often Harriet would come to a clandestine meeting of slaves and explain to them how she could lead them to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Many would refuse her offer because they didn't see themselves in the bondage of slavery. Not seeing themselves in the condition of slavery, they were not willing to undertake a long and arduous trip

to escape it. Disappointed, Harriet would have to begin the trip back to the North with fewer companions than she had hoped for.

The reluctance to admit they were slaves kept many from seeking freedom. Today, the same thing is going on when the gospel is preached—people don't see their need of the Saviour to set them free.



Only the Lord Jesus can set the sinner free. **"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"** (John 8:36).

How does the Lord Jesus set the sinner free? Let me give you three ways.

The Lord Jesus can set people free from the wages of sin. **"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 6:23). "What is the big deal about the wages of sin?" you might ask. "Everyone dies." True, but death in this verse includes the separation of souls from God for all eternity in hell. It is much more than just the physical death of the body. In this case, it is not true that slaves don't receive wages.

He can set souls free from the guilt of sin: **"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses"** (Acts 13:38-39). How precious it is to know that your sins are forgiven and paid for by what the Lord Jesus did on the cross!

He can also set souls free from the



“...nothing the Lord Jesus has to offer will make any sense to you until you see yourself as you truly are — a lost, undone sinner... ”

fear of death. **“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?”** (John 11:25-26).

But nothing the Lord Jesus has to offer will make any sense to you until you see yourself as you truly are — a lost, undone sinner, without

a shred of righteousness, headed towards judgment, both in this life and the life to come. You are not alone in this condition. This is the condition of every man and woman outside of Christ. **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the [slave] of sin,”** the Lord Jesus said in John 8:34. The human race, apart from Christ, is a race of slaves to sin. We have a great need of the Saviour of sinners — the Emancipator of all those who believe!

When the gospel of God’s grace is presented to you, will you see your need of salvation? Or will you pass the Saviour by because you think you are just fine without Him? Oh, be wise and consider what it means to be a lost sinner — a slave to sin — and then ask the Lord Jesus to save you and set you free! ◀

“**Son** therefore shall
If the
make you free, ye shall be

FREE

indeed.”

John 8:36



ECHOES OF GRACE

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*Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life:
no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6).*

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