

WRITINGS OF CHARLES BING

by Charles Bing

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Charles Bing, compiled for study and devotional reading.

100 Chapters

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01.00. Grace Life Articles

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01.01. The Christian's Motivation for Serving God - GraceLife, May 2010

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Introduction

Why do Christians serve God? Why should Christians live a godly life? At one time or another most believers have probably questioned their motives for service and godly living. The purpose of this study is to explore motivations for Christian service and godly living by looking at biblical data. The study will focus chiefly on the Christian's motivation for serving and actively living for God because there are less discernible passive forms of doing God's will (abstaining from evil for example). But to press forward in godly disciplines and to serve God sacrificially calls for effective motivations. One can not really separate godly living from godly service. Christian service is the subject of this study because serious questions about motivation come when confronted with the demands and sacrifices required by it. Such service includes any ministry, be it volunteer or vocational, from teaching and evangelizing to working in the church nursery or kitchen--in other words, any godly activity that seeks to do God's will.

Why Study Motivation?

Scripture shows that believers have served and will serve from both good and bad motives. To be sure, motives do not need to be understood or sorted out before one can serve, but would it not be helpful for someone to know why he or she serves? If indeed there are unworthy motives, they should be avoided. And if present motivation affects the quality of one's eternal existence, one should want to know the consequences.

Motivation is an important study because it reaches to the core of Christian spirituality. Deeds alone are not a good measure of spirituality and so they are an unreliable judge of salvation and personal holiness. The Pharisees had no shortage of outward deeds to which they could point, but they were rebuked by Jesus as hypocrites (Matthew 23:23-30). As a Pharisee, the apostle Paul claimed he was faultless in regards to law keeping, but later he renounced those bragging rights (Php 3:4-8). Jesus himself put the pox on deeds alone when he told self-righteous legalists that despite their many deeds, He never knew them (Matthew 7:22-23).

Deeds should be evaluated separately from their motivations, because extrinsically good deeds can come from intrinsically bad motivations. In the economy of God, however, only the properly motivated deed is rewarded, not the deed in and of itself, as will be shown. To understand one's motivations is to understand in part the heart of God and to be able to please Him better. The danger of this study is that it could lead to excessive introspection or psychologizing. This is far from this author's intent and qualifications. However, much of a person's motivation is evidently unconscious. The apostle Paul seemed to acknowledge possible ambiguity about his own

motivations when he defended himself against those who cast aspersions on his motives. He was unwilling to make a final judgment on himself in this matter but deferred to God who will "reveal the counsels of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

God, of course, is the final judge of motives. Some Christians who examine their own motives may be in for a surprise. Consider how confusing motivation can be among pastors:

It often comes as a shock to pastors to learn that not all their motivation for entering the ministry was highly altruistic and based only on the desire to preach the Word and honor the Lord. Of course this may well have been the conscious motivation, but this does not rule out the existence of additional unconscious determinants.

. . . As with persons in any other helping profession, sometimes the motivation to enter the ministry is to gain the appreciation, attention, and acceptance which is personally needed but which is not being supplied elsewhere. Sometimes it is the unconscious desire to dominate others and in effect to become little popes, which is an easy goal to achieve if one ministers to immature people. Many pastors receive much unconscious gratification from being able to direct people and set them straight. Many pastors after self examination have discovered that part of their original motivation was the need to be infallible and the church situation often plays right into this pathology. Another very important motivating factor in some pastors is the presence of a repressed and unrecognized reservoir of anger and hostility. In this case the pastor will probably become a preacher whose favorite and most frequent message is one of hell fire and brimstone yet he himself will have absolutely no awareness of the great satisfaction he receives from roasting his flock over the flames of hell. 1

Hopefully, a study of motivation will help Christians discover why they really serve God so that they might serve Him from the best motives. A study of motivations should correlate with a biblical view of grace that maintains salvation as a free gift, negates damaging legalistic motivations, and inculcates the abundant biblical data on rewards and accountability. Perhaps because some have misunderstood the reward passages of Scripture, little seems to be written or taught about rewards and even less on motivation. That is another reason for this study. This article will focus chiefly on the New Testament. It will be shown that appeal to motives is very common, though many times motivations are not given, only implied. Also, it will become obvious that motivations overlap. Unworthy motives will be discussed first, then worthy biblical motives.

Unworthy Motivations

Several motivations are clearly against biblical teaching and should not motivate the Christian's service. At best they are detrimental to spiritual growth and at worst will bring God's judgment. These include legalism, false guilt, and self-seeking.

Legalism

There are two kinds of legalism to consider. First is the legalistic view of salvation by works. The other is a form of legalism that can control the Christian's life. As to the first kind, it is pandemic that there are those who serve God in order to earn salvation. This category of people extends to those of other religions who serve in order to earn their idea of eternal salvation or acceptance by God (whatever their perception of Him is). Paul became a Pharisee out of a desire to be among

the righteous of Israel, as his boasts in Php 3:1-21 demonstrate. Those of a Christian heritage or tradition might also serve to earn salvation. According to one biographer, Martin Luther entered the monastery out of fear for his eternal salvation after he was struck by lightning. 2 Errant Christians may falsely assume that volunteering for some Christian ministry might impress God to the point that He rewards them with His eternal life. Of course, this is contrary to the truth of Ephesians 2:8-9 and other passages that speak against works for salvation. A hybrid of this first kind of legalism is the belief that service or godly conduct will keep one from losing one's salvation. Assuming that a person has legitimately believed in Jesus Christ alone at some time in the past, this person, for whatever reason, now (inconsistently and erroneously) believes that he must maintain a certain (and certainly arbitrary) level of service or conduct in order to be acceptable to God or to remain saved. But this also contradicts many passages, such as Romans 8:28-39 or the teaching of Galatians, and contradicts the grace of God that assures salvation only apart from human effort or merit. Christians are not only saved by grace, but kept saved by grace. Chafer comments,

It could not be denied truthfully that the mass of professing Christians have been deprived of the knowledge of positional truth and because of this have never conceived of any other idea of Christian conduct than that they are obligated to make themselves acceptable to God by their own works of righteousness. Naturally, being so deprived of the knowledge of positional truth they are correspondingly ignorant of the true basis and motive for life truth. This one distinction between positional truth and life truth constitutes one of the most vital contrasts between law and grace. 3 The second kind of legalism is the belief that in order to be acceptable as a "good Christian" one must be active in service. Again, it must be said that godly living would normally involve service of some kind. However, circumstances (e.g. relocation, the need for rest, discontinuation of that ministry) may not permit a Christian to minister, which may result in feelings of insecurity about God's acceptance. Such a person could wonder, Is God now frowning His disapproval because I am not busy in ministry? Essentially, in this person's theology God accepts Christians not for who they are, but for what they do. But God accepts all Christians because of their identity in Christ as God's sons.

Both brands of legalism are unbiblical motivations for serving God. The Christian can do nothing to earn or keep God's salvation or favor, because one is accepted in Christ if he has believed in Him.

False Guilt In a related fashion, a Christian may serve God because of a guilty conscience. Some think it too easy to confess and accept forgiveness for free. The fleshly instinct is to do something additional to appease God's perceived anger. Here is the Roman Catholic concept of doing penance, or working off one's sins through prayers and deeds.

It is easy to see how this contradicts grace, for either grace is given as a free gift, or it is not grace. To work for forgiveness is not according to grace. Forgiveness comes freely when one confesses sins to God (1 John 1:9). There is nothing left to do nor any price to pay, because Jesus Christ has done it all and paid it all.

Self-seeking

Sinful selfish motives are surely behind some service. There are many selfish reasons one might serve: financial gain, preeminence, power over others, self-aggrandizement, to impress others, to

prove to others that one is spiritual. Indeed, even eternal rewards can be sought for purely selfish reasons.

There are many biblical examples of those with self-seeking motives. Jesus exposed the hypocritical charity and praying of those who pandered to the praise of people (Matthew 6:1-6) and condemned the Jewish scribes who feigned following God because they loved the public recognition and perks (Mark 12:38-40). Jesus also rebuked James and John when they argued about their future position in the kingdom, which indicates their motives for following Christ were tainted to some degree by selfishness (See Mark 9:33-35; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-30). The Apostle Paul rejoiced that some in Philippi were preaching the gospel, but impugned their selfish motives (Php 1:15-18). John warned Gaius that Diotrefes desired the preeminence in their church (3 John 1:9).

Paul was sensitive to ministry that cloaked selfish motives. He warned Timothy that such men “suppose that godliness is a means of great gain” (1 Timothy 6:1). Because others were trying to subvert Paul’s credibility by questioning his motives, he was compelled repeatedly to assert that he did not minister from selfish motives (2 Corinthians 4:2-5; Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6). Peter had a threatening word for self-seeking teachers as well (2 Peter 2:14-15). The ministry of the gospel was not given to advance any selfish agenda. Those who so misuse it are ministering from unworthy and ungodly motives.

Conclusion

Even Christians can “serve God” for the wrong reasons. But it would be better to say that they participate in works of service, for they are not truly serving God with their errant agendas, only themselves.

Worthy Biblical Motives

Good motives are more easily discerned in the Scriptures than sorted one from another. With this in mind, they will be examined according somewhat to their moral priority, though this is not easy to assume either. The worthy biblical motives considered are love, gratitude, eternal significance, reward, duty, and fear.

Love The Christian’s love for God deserves first focus. But this must also, by biblical edict, result in an accompanying love for others (Matthew 22:37-39).

Surely love is the highest motive for serving God. A boy may be motivated to clean his room by a number of things: fear of punishment, desire for reward, or sense of duty. But isn’t he most virtuous when, out of love for his parents and with nothing to gain only to give, he does what he knows will please them? So too, the child of God is at his ethical zenith when he chooses to do what is good and right out of unselfish love for God. Jesus taught that those who love God will obey Him (John 14:21; 1 John 5:2). In addition to obedience, it seems that this motive of love expresses itself in several other related ways. When one loves God, that person will want to glorify God, please God, and know God better. A brief explanation of each of these follows. When someone glorifies another, love is expressed because the person is exalted for his or her own benefit. When the Christian does something to glorify God, he is doing something which by definition is not self-centered, but God-centered. Jesus persisted to the cross in order to glorify

God. He prayed, "But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father glorify Your name" (John 12:27-28). Similarly, Peter appeals to his readers' desire to see God glorified when he encourages their good works (1 Peter 2:12; cf. Matthew 5:16). The pleasure we derive from glorifying God is what John Piper calls "Christian Hedonism." In other words, a worthy motive for service and worship is the pleasure we enjoy when we glorify God because we love Him. 4

Love will also naturally want to please the object of its affection. When Paul discusses how those who are married desire to please their spouse, but the unmarried desire to please God, he shows that pleasing another person is inherent to a loving relationship (1 Corinthians 7:32-34). Many passages appeal to the motive of a desire to please God. It is why children should obey their parents (Colossians 3:20) and repay them for their care (1 Timothy 5:4). It is also behind Paul's prayer for the Colossians "to walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him" (Colossians 1:10) and the exhortation to the Thessalonians to walk in obedience to God's commandments (1 Thessalonians 4:1). The Hebrews are told to "do good and share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). Pleasing God is also linked closely with obedience in a condition for answered prayer (1 John 3:22). 5

Love will also express itself in a desire for intimacy, i.e. to know another person deeply. To know Jesus Christ more intimately was the driving motivation behind the apostle Paul's forward press to maturity (Php 3:10-14). The idea of abiding in Christ seems to echo the desire for intimacy springing from love. John writes about the love/obedience/abiding relationship: As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (John 15:9-10; cf. 1 John 4:16) But the Bible does not allow for a love for God without a corresponding love for others. Jesus' "first and great commandment" to "love the Lord your God with all your heart . . ." was accompanied by another inseparable command, "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Jesus said this is "the second like it," referring not to rank of importance, but logic of sequence. When someone loves another, they will care about what the object of their love cares about. Since God cares about people, the one who loves God will also love people, especially His children (1 John 4:21). When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, He was qualifying him for ministry to His people, i.e. His "sheep" (John 21:15-17). Jesus assumed that vertical love would elicit a corresponding horizontal love. Paul told the Corinthians that "the love of Christ compels" him in his ministry to them (2 Corinthians 5:14). While contextually it seems "the love of Christ" refers objectively to Christ's love for people rather than subjectively to their own love for Christ, it is Christ's love for Paul that motivates him to serve the objects of Christ's love (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:15).

Love, then, is the chief motivation for a life of Christian service and good works. Those who love God want to obey his desires, glorify Him, please Him, and know Him better. They will also love the objects of His love, other people, which expresses itself in ministry.

Gratitude A second worthy motivation comes from the desire to respond favorably to someone out of gratitude for a kindness shown. A boy might clean his room because he is grateful to his parents for taking him to the zoo that morning. Christians who realize what God has done for them in Christ may be motivated by deep gratitude to respond in service.

It is somewhat difficult to separate gratitude from love. When the sinful woman gratefully washed Jesus' feet with her tear-soaked hair, Jesus explained that those who are forgiven much love much, and those who are forgiven little love little (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus appears to be speaking not so much about the objective nature of forgiveness, as He is about one's subjective understanding of how much they have been forgiven. Those who fully realize how much they have been forgiven will respond in expressions of love and gratitude. 6

Gratitude is a result of grace. Out of gratitude for all God's blessings mentioned in Romans 11:1-36 1, Paul urges his readers to respond by offering their bodies as living sacrifices, which is their "reasonable service" (Romans 12:1-2). Gratitude for Christ's sacrifice is seen in Paul's own desire to live for God (Galatians 2:20). A thankful heart should encompass all that is done in life (Colossians 3:17). Gratitude initiated by grace is also how "the grace of God that brings salvation" teaches believers to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12). Paul indicated his missionary ministry was an expression of his gratitude to God (1 Timothy 1:12) since he attributed his salvation and even his ministry to the grace of God (1 Timothy 1:14). Also, Peter expects his readers to adopt godly conduct since they have tasted that "the Lord is gracious," (1 Peter 2:1-3).

It is fitting and healthy for recipients of someone's love and gracious actions to be grateful and to reciprocate with gratitude-inspired actions towards that person. Such a response seeks nothing for itself, but only echoes the pure motives of the initiating action.

Eternal Significance The desire to fulfill God's eternal purpose can be another significant motivation for the Christian. This speaks of one's enjoyment of the eternal purposes for which they were created, redeemed, sanctified, and glorified. If God has "put eternity in their hearts" (Ecclesiastes 3:11), then people are driven to have that capacity filled. This begins with obtaining eternal life, but goes far beyond life as a quantity to life as a quality of existence. For example, a boy might clean his room because he understands that this act expands his significance in the home and brings the possibility of a greater role for him in the future. When God restores the rule over the earth that Adam lost, it will be through Christ as the "last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45) who will allow believers to rule with Him in the coming kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 20:4-6). If there is eternal significance attached to one's participation in Christ's rule in the kingdom, then the varying degrees in which one will participate are degrees of significance. To enjoy a greater rule can therefore motivate Christians in this life. Dillow calls reigning with Christ the "joy of participating with the Messiah in the final destiny of man." 7

Jesus taught that the things done in this life affect the significance of one's rule in the future. Disobedience or obedience to God's commands determine whether one is called "least in the kingdom of heaven" or "great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19). Jesus' parable of the minas was given to the disciples in anticipation of the kingdom. It taught that responsible stewardship will be rewarded with corresponding responsibilities to rule over cities (Luke 19:11-27). Jesus spoke of inheritance in connection with participation in His rule in the kingdom. Ruling with Him was a motivation and a consolation for those who had left all to follow Christ (Matthew 19:27-30). It is also a motivation to endure faithfully, for "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Paul seemed to separate entrance into the kingdom with possessing or inheriting the kingdom. All Christians will enter the kingdom: "and if children, then heirs--heirs of God . . ." But Paul promised a joint rule with Christ that is conditioned upon one's experience of suffering with Christ in this present life: ". . . and joint heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:17; cf. Titus 3:7-8). 8 Peter also separates mere entry into the kingdom from an abundant entry into the kingdom based on one's appropriation of Christian virtues (2 Peter 1:11). The difference between entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom is greatly neglected by Christians in general and ignored by some altogether. Many Christians, especially reformed Calvinists, view inheritance as merely getting into heaven. 9 In response to this interpretation and the theology behind it, Michael Eaton has called the reward of inheritance "the central motivating theme in the New Testament," 10 an exuberant overstatement when all the motivations are considered. Still, when understood, this concept is a powerful motivation that too many Christians of all theologies neglect. The prospect of "the reward of inheritance" is used by Paul to motivate Christians to serve their masters/employers and to work heartily (Colossians 3:22-24). God's purpose for those in His kingdom is also used as an appeal by Paul to the Thessalonians to "walk worthy of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:12; cf. also 2 Thessalonians 1:5). Inheritance is used to inspire godly conduct in a number of other passages as well (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; Titus 3:7-8).

Hebrews is a study in motivation in itself. In seeking to keep the Hebrew-Christian readers faithful to Christ, the author uses negative motivation (the warning passages, which will be discussed later) and positive motivation. Much of his positive motivation is built around the concept of eternal significance in the coming kingdom of Christ. Finally, in Revelation 2:26-27 Jesus promises to those who are victorious and faithful in the Christian life "power over the nations" when He receives His millennial rule from the Father. The prospect of becoming like Jesus Christ or becoming holy is also used as a motivation that suggests eternal significance. To be made like Jesus is to be divested of sin and that which is temporal, and to be invested with righteousness and that which is eternal. The Bible authors hold that out as a prospect to inspire purity and faithfulness in Christians (1 Peter 1:16; 1 John 3:3).

Christ also appealed to Peter's sense of eternal significance when he called him from a life spent merely catching fish to a life spent catching men (Luke 5:10). There is a powerful urge in most people to invest their lives in something of enduring or eternal value. Life in the present can be graced with eternal significance so that the Christian who loses his life to Christ will save or find his real life (Matthew 10:38-39; Matthew 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-26; John 12:24-26). This refers not to eternal salvation but to the preservation of and the fulfillment of one's essential life that comes from enjoying God's eternal purpose.

Christians want to know not only that they will outlive this life, but that they will supersede this life with a life of eternal significance. This is the gracious purpose God has intended. Since significance is conditioned upon faithfulness, obedience, and service, it motivates believers towards these virtues.

Rewards

Rewards is a broader category than eternal significance, though eternal significance can be seen as a reward in itself. Rewards in the Bible can be enjoyed in this life or in eternity. Both prospects

are unquestionably a motivation for Christian service. Christians might serve faithfully for rewards just as a boy might clean his room because he is promised a dollar to do so. But such an illustration will raise the question about the propriety of rewards as a motivation. Isn't it selfish for the boy to work in order to receive a dollar? That is not an easy question to answer, because it necessitates judging motives. Yes, it is selfish if the boy intends to spend it only on himself (as might be expected with an immature boy). However, what if the boy wanted the dollar to spend on a gift for his parents? It seems that one's response to rewards is ultimately an expression of one's maturity. If someone desires rewards so that he or she can better enjoy God, serve Him, or serve others, then that motive is good. Thus crowns are ultimately for throwing down in worship and gratitude at the feet of the Savior who gives them (Revelation 4:10). Besides, if God designs and delights to give rewards, then would it be good to deny Him that pleasure? Can the Christian's love for God and desire to please Him be separated from the motivation to receive what God would gladly give? The parable of the vineyard workers in Matthew 20:1-15 shows that God retains the sovereign prerogative to bestow rewards. He is in no way indebted to do so, rather, He delights to reward His servants.

Jesus promised that he will dispense rewards at His coming according to one's works (Matthew 16:27; Revelation 22:12). Rewards are also tied directly to the eschatological event known as the Judgment Seat of Christ (or Bema). It is here that every Christian will give an account (Romans 14:10-12) for what he or she has done and receive a corresponding reward (2 Corinthians 5:10). The latter reference is especially pertinent because Paul saw the Bema judgment as a motivation for his ministry of persuading men (2 Corinthians 5:11). Likewise, the context for the discussion of rewards at the Bema in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 is in the context of ministers who build into other believers. Those who build with good motives ("gold, silver, precious stones") will receive an unspecified reward.

While many rewards are eternal in nature, some rewards are of a more temporal nature. Jesus promised that those who left all to follow Him would be rewarded in this life as well as in the future (Mark 10:28-31; cf. Matthew 19:27-30 and Luke 18:28-30). Other rewards that are enjoyed in this present life include (for deacons) "a good standing and great boldness in the faith" (1 Timothy 3:13), godliness that enhances life (1 Timothy 4:8), and the "crown of life" (James 1:12).¹¹ With the prospect of reward comes also the prospect for a loss of that reward. If gaining rewards is a positive motivation, then losing them is a negative motivation. Jesus used parables to teach the possibility of lost rewards in the kingdom (Matthew 22:1-14; Matthew 25:14-25; Luke 19:11-27). Paul noted that anyone who ministered with improper motives ("wood, hay, straw") would have his work burned at the Judgment Seat of Christ so that he would "suffer loss" though "he himself will be saved" (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). If a believer's work is burned as useless material, it will not be rewarded.

Serving God for the sake of rewards is not necessarily a mercenary motivation. God offers rewards as a way to both enhance his children's enjoyment of His goodness and a way to console them when they sacrifice to follow Him. While rewards are sometimes left unspecified, it should be enough to know that they are God-given and therefore good for both He and His children. It may well be that the highest motivation from rewards will be the opportunity to give them back worshipfully to the Savior in the future.

Duty The motivation of duty is not one often contemplated. Duty is action that comes from a sense of obligation or commitment to a purpose or calling. It springs from personal convictions that are true to a higher purpose. A boy might clean his room because it is right to do so and he has obligated or committed himself to do so.

Ideally, the believer's execution of duty will be accompanied by love and gratitude towards the one who charges him with it. However, duty is compelled by its own motive. Someone may persist in a ministry compelled by a sense of duty though she might feel little love or gratitude because of some besetting circumstance. There is a strong motivation in some to live up to their commitments and obligations because they were originally made to a high principle with proper motives.

Doing one's duty may result in a reward, but true duty does not expect one. In Jesus' teaching on the faithful servant, duty is done as its own reward (Luke 17:7-10). The servant is not first rewarded with a meal for his work, but is expected to do first his duty in preparing his master's meal before he himself eats. Jesus asks, Does he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' (Luke 17:9-10)

Jesus Himself was motivated by His sense of duty and purpose. When tempted to distraction from His preaching ministry, He explained He would keep on "because for this purpose I have come forth" (Mark 1:38). Likewise, He went to the cross in great agony because of His duty to the Father's purpose (John 12:27). At the end of His life, Jesus was able to say to His Father, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). Hebrews presents Jesus as a faithful High Priest in performing His duties before God and for man (Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 5:5-10). In the same way, a believer can recognize God's calling to a certain ministry and then desire to fulfill it. Paul was motivated by his calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles (2 Timothy 1:11). He considered it a divine appointment (1 Timothy 1:1; 1 Timothy 2:7) that kept him motivated to finish his ministry for the Lord (Acts 20:24). Paul used the same motivation with Timothy when he told him to "fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). A sense of duty is inspired by the many analogies used for the Christian minister. All involve living up to a position or an obligation. One prevalent analogy is that of a steward who must be faithful in his management responsibilities (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). As such Paul felt he had no choice but to preach the gospel entrusted to him regardless of any reward (1 Corinthians 9:17-18). He considered the gospel ministry a sacred trust or commitment that was to be managed responsibly for the Lord's sake (cf. Colossians 1:25; 1 Timothy 1:11, 1 Timothy 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:10; 2 Timothy 1:14; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:3).

There are other analogies of duty and calling. For example, Paul considered himself an ambassador for Christ who had been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). He also compared the Christian and his duties to that of a soldier, athlete, and farmer (2 Timothy 2:3-6). As a "prisoner of Jesus Christ" Paul was bound to do what his divine Master dictated (Philemon 1:1, Philemon 1:8). Perhaps Paul's favorite analogy was that of a servant, or literally "slave," who was obligated to do His Master's bidding (cf. Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 4:1; Galatians 1:10; Php 1:1; Titus 1:1). When duty is invoked, it is easy to understand the necessity of faithfulness. Faithful to what? To one's duty, calling, or purpose designated by God. Jesus commended faithful stewards and servants who performed their duties (Matthew 24:45; Matthew

25:23; Luke 16:10-12). Paul commended those who were faithful in their duty to him or to Christ (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 1:7; Colossians 4:7, Colossians 4:9). Herein lies the admonition to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed" (2 Timothy 2:15). There is no shame in faithful performance of one's expected duty. The motivation of duty may not evoke the nobler sentiments stirred by the motives of love or gratitude, but who can deny it is a worthy and even major motivation in the New Testament? Duty sometimes connotes perfunctory or mechanical actions. However, it is often more noble than suspected when it reflects the virtues of integrity, truthfulness, respect, submission, commitment, loyalty, diligence, responsibility, and faithfulness.

Fear

Fear is another worthy biblical motivation. It is more a motivation to not do evil than it is to do good or to serve God. A boy might clean his room because he fears a punishment if he doesn't clean. But when the threat of punishment is removed, so is his motivation. In this negative sense, fear is the most immature of the motivations because it comes from an immature or undeveloped love:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18) Since perfect love casts out fear of judgment, love is evidently the superior motivation. As seen in 1 John 4:18, the Christian may fear a negative judgment at the Bema. If there she receives recompense for what she has done, it is good only if her works have been good (2 Corinthians 5:9-11; 1 Peter 1:17) or if she has faithfully fulfilled the ministry entrusted to her (2 Timothy 3:8). If Paul's aim was to be pleasing to the Lord at the Bema, the inverse motivation is not to be displeasing. He realized that he could be "disqualified" ¹² from receiving rewards if he did not discipline his body (1 Corinthians 9:27). Christians may also displease God and experience a negative judgment because of unmerciful, unloving behavior towards others (James 2:13) or irresponsible use of one's position as a teacher (James 3:1). This possibility prompts inquiry about the negative consequences of the Judgment Seat of Christ where believers will give an account for what they have done, both good and bad (2 Corinthians 5:10). Certainly one negative consequence is the denial of one's share in kingdom rule or the rewards that were discussed earlier. Another is the negative emotion of shame due to unfaithfulness (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 John 2:28). This shame may result from the shame God has towards those who were unfaithful (Luke 9:26). ¹³

Christians can also serve in fear of God's discipline or chastisement. The admonition to servants is to obey their masters "in sincerity of heart, fearing God." For this there is reward, "But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality" (Colossians 3:23-25). Here the consequence may include not just a denial of rewards at the Bema, but a negative recompense, which might imply temporal chastisement. Likewise, Paul wanted God to repay Alexander for betraying him (1 Timothy 4:14). Peter warned that God's judgment would "begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). God's chastisement of sin through physical consequences shows that there is good reason to fear God when one disobeys Him (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 11:29-32; James 5:15-16, James 5:19). Encompassed in the concept of divine discipline is the recognition that whatever is good can inversely be turned into a fear if the loss of it is invoked. Thus for example, the Christian could fear losing fellowship with God, fellowship with others, fruitfulness, or usefulness to God. The all-knowing, all-seeing judgment of God brings an

awareness to all that actions are being committed in the sight of God or with God as witness. This recurring consciousness mentioned in the Bible denotes the accountability to which believers are held for their actions, an accountability that implies negative consequences for disobedience (2 Corinthians 7:12; 2 Corinthians 8:21, 2 Corinthians 12:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:3; 1 Timothy 6:13; Hebrews 4:12-13). The book of Hebrews stands alone with its unique warning passages unquestionably intended to evoke a motivating fear in the readers. While the positive motivation for eternal inheritance is the major theme of the book, these negative motivations are formidable. They are designed to evoke fear in those who are tempted to turn away from Christ or not press on in their sanctification. When surveying the warnings, one notices that the consequences of apostasy and unfaithfulness sound terrifying though they are not really defined. 14 Such ambiguity should not lessen the impact of these warnings. Indeed, uncertainty about what is in store for apostates might even heighten their fears. It should be enough to know that God will deal severely with the believer who turns from the truth.

There is a sense in which fear is less negative and more positive. This would be fear in the sense of reverence. In the Old Testament there is an emphasis on the fear of the Lord, an attitude that desires to conform to God's law. Likewise, in the New Testament there is a similar attitude of reverence. Cornelius was a man who feared God and gave alms and prayed always (Acts 10:2). Paul's pleas for holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1) and for mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) are based on the fear of God. Beneath the surface of this healthy respect also lurks the negative kind of fear, as demonstrated by Paul's statement to the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Php 2:12). In the last warning of Hebrews, the author encourages his readers to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28). 15 When positive motivations that draw Christians forward are not enough, the negative motivation of fear can keep Christians from slipping back. Such fear does not appeal to one's higher virtues. It appeals more to self-preservation. But this will sometimes accomplish God's ultimate purpose of shaping godly conduct and character, especially with the less mature, until they learn to serve God from a higher motive.

Conclusion

There are good biblical motivations for serving God and living a godly life. Though how they overlap is not so discernible, they together or alone can motivate the Christian to one degree or another. Most probably a believer is influenced by different motivations at different times depending on his or her circumstances, disposition, background, and biblical knowledge.

Some Practical Implications

It is clear that unworthy motivations have no place in the Christian's life or service. Legalism, false guilt, and self-seeking can not produce godliness because their inspiration is not godly truth and the assurances of God's Word that comes through faith. Motives must constantly be evaluated. If the truth were known, many in vocational and volunteer ministry might find that too much of their "ministry" is really fodder for repentance instead of foundation for reward. Christians should call into account those they see ministering with selfish or unworthy motives (1 Peter 4:7), because God is disgraced by such greedy and perverse conduct.

Furthermore, Christians should learn to inspire others to godly living and service with the highest of motivations, beginning with love and gratitude to God for all that He has done. Christians must constantly remind one another of all that God has freely given them by His grace. The disciplines of discipleship will fade in the believer's life without these heartfelt motives that pull one forward into maturity. People can not be legislated into spiritual growth, nor can they be shamed into godly service or intimidated into Christ-like maturity. Rather, it is the duty and ministry of knowing Christians to teach others that there are high and worthy motivations to which they can aspire, and that there are also temporal and eternal consequences for how they shape their lives and ministries.

Finally, preaching, teaching, and counseling should seek to effect change by appealing to the highest motives. Then the resultant change and service to God will have enduring value for both the speaker and the hearers.

Conclusion The intent of this article has been to shed light on a subject rarely addressed as a whole. It has attempted to organize in a preliminary fashion the New Testament presentation of motivation for godly living and service. To be sure, the subject is complex and not always given to easy discernment. Humans are complex beings who rarely understand their own motives for doing things, but God does. He can use even improper motives to serve His purposes and accomplish something good. Fortunately He will be the final Judge of one's motives. Still, there are clearly decent and proper motives that God has designed to accomplish His will in and through every believer. In as much as Christians learn and apply them, they will be pleasing to God in their lives and service.

References:

1 Basil Jackson, 'Psychology, Psychiatry, and the Pastor: Part II: Maturity in the Pastor and Parishioner,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (April 1975), 111-12.

2 Bainton, Roland H., *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 25.

3 Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1978), VI:163.

4 John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1996), 23. His definition seems to assume a love for God that seeks to glorify and enjoy Him, as shown by his 'Love Poem' (pp. 25-31; Also cf. p. 20, 49).

5 It seems no coincidence that the pericope following the story of the sinful woman mentions other women who were healed of diseases and demons, and that they assisted Jesus with provisions (Luke 8:1-3).

6 Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 590.

7 Important to this interpretation is placement of the comma after "God" rather than "Christ" contra the NKJV (quoted above) and the NIV and so omitted here. For a good discussion, see Dillow, 55, 86-87, 373-77, 416. He argues that there is a difference between an unconditional heir of God (all Christians), and a conditional heir of Christ (deserving Christians).

8 See Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 175.

9 *Ibid.*, 179.

10 The first indication of eternal significance is in Hebrews 1:14 where the author reminds the readers that they “will inherit salvation.” The future tense is used in reference to the future purpose for which they were saved in the past. Later, the author indicates that becoming “partakers of Christ” depends on whether ‘we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end’ (Hebrews 3:14). He reminds his readers that a promise of millennial rest remains for those who are faithful (Hebrews 4:1, Hebrews 4:9). This enjoyment of God’s blessings can begin in this life to a degree (Hebrews 4:11), but continues on into eternity. His comparison to Joshua’s day shows that he is talking about not only entering the kingdom, but possessing or enjoying it as Jesus Christ allows faithful believers to share in it with Him as “partakers.” Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, but all did not possess it or receive rest because of disobedience (Hebrews 4:6-8). These promises are inherited through faithful endurance (Hebrews 6:11-12) as is illustrated by the many examples of faith in Hebrews 11:1-40.

11 This is probably a temporal reward because the similar blessing of 5:11 is temporal (See Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing*, ed. Arthur L. Farstad and Robert N. Wilkin [Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994], 25-26; J. Ronald Blue, ‘James,’ in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament ed.*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 815-36 [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983], 821). The crown of life in Revelation 2:10 is evidently an eternal reward because it is bestowed after death.

12 That this translation of *adokimos* as ‘disqualified’ has rewards as its object, not salvation, is obvious from the fact that Paul includes himself as a hypothetical possibility. See the discussion in Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1978), III:308, and Bob Wilkin, “The Biblical Distinction Between Eternal Salvation and Eternal Rewards: A Key to Proper Exegesis” (*Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 16 [Spring 1996]), 15-24.

13 For a fuller discussion of the negative consequences of the judgment seat of Christ, see Dillow, 530-49.

14 The first warning (2:1-4) simply says that those who neglect their Christian faith will not escape (v. 3). But escape what exactly? The second (3:7—4:13) warns against missing the blessing of rest, a fearful prospect to the author (4:1). The warning against unbelief also invokes God’s anger (3:10,17) and the prospect of the readers’ “fall” (4:11). But these are all ambiguous to a great degree. The third warning (6:1-12) is an admonition to press on to maturity with an attendant negative consequence of what will happen if they do not, implied by the analogy of the thorny land which ‘is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned’ (6:8). But how does this analogy apply to the Christian? The fourth warning (10:26-31) mentions ‘a fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries’ (v 27) and a ‘worse punishment’ than that experienced by those who rejected Moses (vv. 28-29). It has an ominous ending: ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’ (v 31). But with all this, the judgment is still not specified. The last warning (12:25-29) declares that they will not escape who refuse to listen to Christ (v. 25), and ends with the statement ‘For our God is a consuming fire’ (v 29).

While many interpreters consider these terrible-sounding fates to be eternal punishment, It should be noted that the central purpose of the warnings is a fear of God's unspecified judgment. The preponderance of evidence shows that Hebrews was written to genuine Christians. As noted earlier in this article, God's judgment of Christians can have negative elements both temporally and at the Judgment Seat of Christ. For example, the imagery of fire in 10:27 is in harmony with the many references to fiery judgment of God's people in the Old Testament (e.g. Deut. 4:24; Num. 11:1; Ps. 78:21; 89:46; Isa. 29:6; 33:14; Lam. 2:3; 4:11; Eze. 22:20-21,31; 38:19; Zeph. 1:18) and in the New Testament (John 15:6; 1 Cor. 3:13-15). Thus in 10:31 it is noted that the judgment is for 'His people' (v. 30) and that at least they fall into God's hands, not out of them.

15 The word used in these verses (except Heb. 12:28) is phobeo which usually means be afraid, in the sense of terror, but it can also be used to express reverence or respect (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 1952 ed., s.v. 'phobeo,' 870-71). In Hebrews 12:28 the word used is eulabeia which is more restricted in meaning to awe or reverence (Ibid., s.v. "eulabeia," 322).

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01.02. Is There Hellfire in Hebrews? - GraceLife, 2010

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Is There Hellfire in Hebrews? - GraceLife, 2010

Synopsis:

Though it seems nothing is simple about the Epistle to the Hebrews, this study seeks to make a simple point about the nature of the fire imagery used in three of the warnings sections.

Though it seems nothing is simple about the Epistle to the Hebrews, this study seeks to make a simple point about the nature of the fire imagery used in three of the warnings sections. Interpretations of the warning passages in Hebrews (Hebrews 2:1-4, Hebrews 3:7-18, Hebrews 4:1-13, Hebrews 6:1-8, Hebrews 10:26-39, Hebrews 12:25-29) usually assume that the judgment threatened is eternal damnation. There are some exceptions that take the judgment as other than eternal damnation.² One exception is the view that the judgment threatened is the danger brought by the physical destruction of Jerusalem.³ Another exception views the judgment as God's temporal discipline, which can even result in death.⁴ Still another argues that it is some kind of loss at the future event called the Judgment Seat of Christ.⁵ But these alternative interpretations are outnumbered by the preponderance of voices favoring hellfire in Hebrews. Is the majority interpretation based on assumption, theological bias, or biblical evidence?

Interpretations favoring eternal judgment are no doubt influenced toward that position because of the strong language used in the warnings. One aspect of that language is the fire imagery used in three of the warnings (Hebrews 6:8; Hebrews 10:27). The pertinent parts of each of these three warnings are listed below with the fire imagery emphasized.

Hebrews 6:7-8 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.⁶

Hebrews 10:26-27 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.?

Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. The mention of fire seems the tipping point toward the assumption that all the warnings threaten eternal judgment in hell. For example, McKnight comments on Hebrews 6:7-8, The image of being cursed by God, with its close association with fire, can only adequately be explained as an allusion to Gehenna or hell, an allusion to God's punishment and retributive justice.⁷ One wonders how interpretation of the warning passages would be influenced if fire were not mentioned. This assumption of hellfire seems to prejudice some basic assumptions about the spiritual state of the readers. One would hope that the question of the readers' spiritual condition would inform one's interpretation of the warnings' judgments since there is far more

explicit detail given about their condition than there is the nature of the judgment. However, it seems highly likely that many interpreters have worked backward, that is, they have concluded that hellfire is the judgment and that has influenced their characterization of the readers.⁸ Of course, Arminian interpreters have no problem accepting the obvious evidence that the readers are genuine⁹ believers¹⁰. Calvinist interpreters tend to dodge the theological bullet aimed at the doctrine of eternal security by saying that the readers addressed in the warnings are either false professors of Christianity¹¹ or that the warnings are only hypothetical (i.e., the sin in view is actually impossible to commit).¹² The interpretation of all aspects of the warning passages requires more time and space than this study can afford. I intend to focus only on a very specific aspect of those warnings, the fire imagery found in three of the warnings. Do these references to fire demand a judgment of hellfire on unbelievers, or do they refer to some other form of severe judgment on believers? Fire is definitely used in the Bible for the punishment of eternal hell.¹³ We will not examine those passages where fire is obviously referring to hell. I will comment from a non-Arminian perspective since I believe that the Scriptural evidence for eternal security, including that which is presented in this article, is too overwhelming to deny.¹⁴ Before we consider how fire is used in the three warnings, we must briefly discuss the spiritual state of the readers and the sin that they are in danger of committing. The State of the Readers

Crucial to any interpretation of Hebrews and the warning passages is an understanding of the spiritual state of the readers. Are they believers or unbelievers or a mixed group? Some commentators agree the epistle is generally written to believers, but the warnings to unbelievers. This views the target audience for the warnings as those who profess, but do not possess faith in Jesus Christ. But is this consistent with the evidence in the text? Most agree that the rest of the book clearly addresses believers. Is there any apparent disparity between the way those in the warnings are addressed and the rest of the epistle? A brief discussion will show that the warnings are intended for believers.

Evidence from outside the warnings

Most agree that the epistle was written generally to believers, so little needs to be said here. Apart from the warnings, we find the readers addressed as brethren? (Hebrews 10:19, Hebrews 13:22) and holy brethren? (Hebrews 3:1). Things are said to them that can only apply to Christians (cf. Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 6:9, Hebrews 5:12, Hebrews 10:24-26). Note that all these affirmations appear shortly before or after the warning sections. Also, the nature of the exhortations in Hebrews 13:1-25 shows they were obviously intended for believers. There is no attempt to apply them to two different groups. In fact, in the entire epistle, the warning passages are never introduced with any transition that indicates the author is shifting his attention to a different group within the readership. To imply otherwise would be artificial and disruptive to the flow of the text.

Evidence from within the warnings We now examine how the author speaks to those warned. His language makes it clear that they are Christians.

1. They are addressed using first person plural pronouns or verbs, which shows the author identifies with them as believers (Hebrews 2:1, Hebrews 2:3, Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 3:19, Hebrews 4:1-3, Hebrews 4:11, Hebrews 6:1, Hebrews 6:3, Hebrews 10:26, Hebrews 10:30, Hebrews 10:39, Hebrews 12:28).

2. They are also called brethren? (Hebrews 3:12). Just as in the non-warning sections, this clearly shows their common position in God's family.
3. They have believed (Hebrews 4:3, Hebrews 10:39). This speaks of an unqualified faith in Christ as Savior.¹⁵
4. They have Christian confidence (Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 10:35). This refers to their assurance of the benefits of Christ's provisions. They are therefore told to hold fast (Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 4:14, Hebrews 10:23) and endure (Hebrews 10:36) in that confidence.
5. They are in danger of denying their faith. That they could drift away? (Hebrews 2:1), depart from the living God? (Hebrews 3:12), fall away? (Hebrews 6:6), draw back? (Hebrews 10:39), or turn away? (Hebrews 12:25) demands a point of departure from which they can fall. The only such point in the epistle is Jesus Christ and their confession of Him.
6. They are encouraged to enter God's rest (Hebrews 4:11) and go on to maturity (Hebrews 6:1). As in the Old Testament, rest? refers not just to the reception of God's promise, but the enjoyment of it. It is a privilege of believers only, as is the possibility of growth into maturity.¹⁶
7. They suffered for their faith after they were illuminated? (Hebrews 10:32-34). They were able to endure this persecution because they knew they had a heavenly possession (Hebrews 10:34).
8. They are never told to believe in Christ, which we would expect if they were unbelievers. It would be a travesty for the author to omit this. Instead, he says the epistle was written to exhort or encourage the readers (Hebrews 13:22).
9. They are described as having experienced the blessings that come with faith in Christ. The most convincing evidence is from Hebrews 6:4-5 : They were enlightened? had tasted the heavenly gift,? had become partakers of the Holy Spirit,? and had tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.? They had also received the knowledge of the truth? (Hebrews 10:26), were sanctified? (Hebrews 10:29), know? God (Hebrews 10:30), were illuminated? (Hebrews 10:32), and by implication are called just? or righteous (Hebrews 10:38). Any attempt to apply these descriptions to unbelievers forces the text at the expense of the plain sense of the language.
10. They are given Old Testament analogies that in the past and now in their present apply to God's chastening of His people. In Hebrews 3:16, Psalms 95:1-11 is used of the redeemed who came out of Egypt and so obviously applies to the redeemed readers. In Hebrews 10:30, Deuteronomy 32:36 speaks of God judging His people? (discussed below).
11. They are exhorted to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear? (Hebrews 12:28), something impossible for unbelievers.
12. They face the prospect of rewards conditioned on their faithful perseverance and obedience. They can be partakers of Christ? (Hebrews 3:14), can enter God's rest (Hebrews 4:9, Hebrews 4:11), can have an enduring possession . . . in heaven? (Hebrews 10:34), can receive a great reward? (Hebrews 10:35), and are receiving a kingdom? (Hebrews 12:28).¹⁷ The evidence is overwhelming, both in the general nature of the epistle and in the warnings themselves, that the author is addressing Christians.¹⁸ The fact that he so often and so clearly reminds them of their salvation experience is a crucial basis for his appeals to go on to maturity. Based on these clear

affirmations in the text, attempts to explain away the obvious seems theologically driven. They are not in need of salvation, but faithful endurance. The Sin Facing the Readers

Much has been and could be said about the nature of the nature of the sin the readers are in danger of committing. Most agree that the epistle in general is an exhortation to persevere in faithfulness. The warnings are a negative motivation toward this same end, but they also indicate that the readers could fall away, that is, neglect to persevere, or worse, turn back to the safety of Judaism.¹⁹ Evidently, these are Jewish believers who are tempted to mask their Christianity with Judaism, or revert altogether, because of the threat of persecution. The warning in Hebrews 6:1-20 is especially informative. The immediate context is neatly bracketed by a concern that the readers are dull of hearing? (Hebrews 5:11) and might become sluggish? (Hebrews 6:12). The author reminds them that they should have grown to be teachers by now (Hebrews 5:12). This supports the recurring exhortations in Hebrews to press forward in Christian faith and growth (Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 4:13, Hebrews 10:23, Hebrews 12:1). Forming an inclusio with Hebrews 5:11-12 is Hebrews 6:11-12, another exhortation to grow and press on in their faith. The warning in Hebrews 6:4-8 implies that the readers could indeed fall away,²⁰ which is interpreted by some as apostasy from Christian beliefs or a total denial of the Christian faith.²¹ A similar word and thought is seen in Hebrews 4:11, translated fall,²² which refers to the example of the sin of rebellion against the Lord which happened at Kadesh Barnea (cf. Hebrews 3:12; Numbers 14:1-45), an obvious background for this warning.²³ The argument and context of Hebrews suggests that this is a falling away from their profession of Christ and confidence in Him (Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 10:23-25, Hebrews 10:35-39), which would be the case if they returned to the Mosaic system of sacrifices and the safety of Judaism to avoid persecution.²⁴ In the grammar of the original language, falling away is not treated as hypothetical.²⁵ The sin in the warning of Hebrews 6:4-8 seems to be the same sin in the warning of Hebrews 10:26-29. The willful sin of Hebrews 10:26 would be a deliberate abandonment of their confession of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for a return to insufficient Jewish sacrifices. The author wrote to the Hebrews that Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many? (Hebrews 9:28), that by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified? (Hebrews 10:14), and that once forgiven there is no longer an offering for sin? (Hebrews 10:18). The Law offered them nothing since it looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:1-10). The background for understanding the warning of Hebrews 10:26-39 is very likely Numbers 15:30-31. There we see that for certain serious (or presumptuous) sins no sacrifices were stipulated, therefore those who committed those sins were cut off? from their people (put to death). The author is saying that if the readers of Hebrews abandon the only sufficient sacrifice for their sins, they too will be judged severely. Their salvation is not the issue. The sin in view for the warning of Hebrews 12:24-29 is named in Hebrews 12:15 as falling short of the grace of God, which would be a more general way of characterizing a failure to press on to maturity and to shrink back from persecution by returning to the cover of Judaism, the same sin that is in view in Hebrews 6:1-20 and Hebrews 10:26. The exhortation to not fall short corresponds to the opposite exhortation let us have grace? in Hebrews 10:28. This study is written from the perspective that the warnings concern the same sin, that of neglecting to persevere in the Christians faith and worse, of turning back to Judaism. Having said this, the exact nature of the sin does not necessarily impact the nature of the judgments.

God's People Judged by Fire The judgments in the three warnings under consideration mention fire. It is very informative to see how fire is used as a judgment against God's people in both the Old and the New Testaments. The examples that follow do not exhaust the references, but are enough to establish a consistent pattern of how God deals with His people who persist in sin. In the Old Testament The Old Testament is an obvious background for the language and warnings of this epistle to Jewish believers.²⁷ Fire is often used in reference to God's people in the Old Testament. Most pertinent to this study is how it is used of Israel in a non-soteriological sense. The concept of eternal hellfire is difficult if not impossible to find.²⁸ Three categories of usage will show how fire can be used in the Old Testament for God's disciplinary punishment, His jealousy, and His purifying purposes.

Sometimes fire is used to depict God's anger or wrath that disciplines His people. Some of the clearer examples follow with a brief summary of the context.

Leviticus 10:1-2. Fire consumed Nadab and Abihu for offering profane fire? to God, who then consumed them with a literal fire. These were Levitical priests in God's service.

Numbers 16:35. When Korah (a Levitical priest), Dathan, Abiram, and 250 of Israel's leaders challenged Moses' leadership, the ground swallowed the three men while the 250 were consumed by literal fire from God.²⁹

Numbers 11:1-3. Some of those Israelites who complained in the wilderness were consumed by fire, but some of the complainers were spared when Moses interceded for them. This shows that these complainers had a privileged relationship with God as part of Israel.

Psalms 78:21. In spite of God's blessings of provision for Israel in the Wilderness, they still complained, so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel.? The judgment fire in the Wilderness was a literal fire.

Psalms 80:14-16. The psalmist prays for God's revival because Israel is like a vineyard with broken down hedges and a vine that has been burned.

Psalms 89:46. After listing the temporal judgments endured by Israel and reminding God of His covenant with David, the psalmist asks how long God's wrath will burn like fire against Israel.

Isaiah 42:25. Because Israel disobeyed, God burned them with his furious anger, but intends to redeem them as His own (Isaiah 43:1 ff.).

Jeremiah 4:4. God calls the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to repentance lest He send His fury on them like a burning fire.

Jeremiah 11:16. God compares the house of Judah and the house of Israel to a tree He has planted but that He will break and burn because of their worship of Baal.

Jeremiah 15:14. Because of Manasseh's sin, God will judge Israel with temporal judgments that are compared to a fire kindled in His anger that burns them.

Jeremiah 17:4. Israel's idolatry has kindled a fire of God's anger, which will result in their servitude to their enemies.

Lamentations 2:3-4; Lamentations 4:11. God has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire? and kindled a fire in Zion,? references to the calamity of Jerusalem's siege and destruction which resulted in severe famine.

Amos 2:5. God will send a fire upon Judah because they disobeyed His commandments.

Fire is also used to picture God's jealousy for the devotion of His people:

Deuteronomy 4:24. God's jealousy is compared to a consuming fire, because He longs for Israel's devotion and He will judge them if they worship idols.

Psalms 79:5. The psalmist asks how long God's anger will last against Jerusalem and how long His jealousy will burn like fire.

Fire sometimes refers to a cleansing or purifying trial or judgment:

Psalms 66:10-12. The psalmist declares how God has refined Israel as silver and brought her through fire.

Zechariah 13:9. In the Day of the Lord, God calls one third of Israel My people? and declares they will be brought through the refiner's fire like silver or gold.

Malachi 3:2-3. As a refiner purifies silver and gold, God will refine and purify the Sons of Levi.

These examples refer to God's temporal wrath, not to eternal judgment. Let us also remember that in the Old Testament God's fire is sometimes used in unequivocally positive ways. For example, His appearance was sometimes marked by fire (Genesis 22:6-7; Exodus 3:2). God used a pillar of fire to guide the Israelites through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22; Numbers 9:15-16) and to accompany the Tabernacle (40:38). In the Song of Solomon love is compared to a fire (Song 8:6).³⁰ In the New Testament New Testament uses continue the pattern of God's judgment of His people with references to fire.

John 15:6. Believers are compared to branches which either abide in Jesus Christ and bear fruit or do not abide in Him and are as useless as vines which are burned.³¹

1 Corinthians 3:13-15. In a future day of judgment those believers whose works are unworthy will have those works burned, though they themselves will be saved.

1 Peter 4:12. Peter encourages the readers to rejoice in the fiery trials they are experiencing because they are an opportunity for God's blessing in the present and in the future. In the New Testament, fire is also used positively in references to the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11-12; Acts 2:3). Since in both Testaments fire can be used positively or negatively, literally or figuratively, and temporally or eternally, context must determine its meaning. In the three warnings of Hebrews

Now we can evaluate the mention of fire in the three warnings of Hebrews. A very important general observation is that eternal fire, eternal torment, hell, or Gehenna are never mentioned in these warnings.

Hebrews 6:8.

Before considering the judgment of fire in Hebrews 6:8, it would be good to establish the flow of thought from the first consequence of falling away, the impossibility of renewing these believers to repentance. Those who say this passage teaches that Christians can lose eternal life must admit that it also teaches it is impossible for them to repent so as to be saved again. They would have no second opportunity to be saved. Since they had already repented of the dead works of the Mosaic system (Hebrews 6:1; cf. Hebrews 9:14), they could not do that again because they knew better. When the readers became Christians they had rejected the Jewish sacrifices and accepted the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To go back and identify with Judaism is to publicly deny the benefits of Christ's sacrifice and even show implicit agreement that Christ deserved to die, thus the statement in Hebrews 6:6 since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. With such an attitude it is impossible to bring them back to repentance. These believing readers could make a pivotal decision not to press forward, to deny the provision of Christ's sacrifice, and thus forfeit the benefits of professing and growing in Christ. If they do, they cannot claim ignorance and start over. Again, this alludes to the pivotal incident at Kadesh Barnea mentioned in Hebrews 3:7-19 in which those Israelites who decided to turn back were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, though they tried (cf. Numbers 14:1-45). The author later uses Esau as an example of one who could not have another chance though he sought it diligently with tears (Hebrews 12:15-17).

Hebrews 3:7-8 compare believers to earth that is blessed by rain, but either brings forth fruit or brings forth thorns. A believer who receives God's blessings but turns away from the faith is like earth that produces thorns and briars instead of fruit and is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. The word rejected (adokimos) means to not pass the test or to be disqualified³² and is used of believers in the New Testament in reference to losing future rewards, but is never used of hell. According to common agricultural practice, earth that bears useless thorns is set on fire to burn the thorns so that the earth might become productive in the future. It is important to note that in the original language there is only one earth, not two, and it (the believer) is not burned, but the thorns are burned (what the believer produces). Note also that the earth is near to being cursed, not actually cursed. This denotes the seriousness of the apostasy (Hebrews 6:6), but stops short of a total (eternal) rejection. When it says that the earth is to be burned, one correctly pictures the thorns and briars being burned off the earth, because the earth itself cannot burn. Thus it pictures a fire of judgment and/or purging that burns up that which is useless. This judgment could be God's temporal discipline in this life, since its goal is the productivity of the judged believer's life (cf. John 15:6).³³ Some who take the judgment as temporal also see it as a reference to the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.³⁴ It would make sense if it referred to both since a believer who is disciplined for ignoring God's warning would also lose his or her reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. As mentioned earlier, some would also take this as a reference to the danger associated with the Jews and the physical destruction of Jerusalem.³⁵

There seems to be an intended relationship of this warning to Isaiah 5:1-7 which warned Israel that God would burn her for being an unfruitful vineyard.³⁶ The warning of Hebrews 6:1-20 shows that believers who do not go forward with their faith squander God's blessings so that what is produced is not useful but useless and fit only to be discarded, or burned. The fire does not indicate hellfire. This passage does not teach that one can lose eternal salvation, nor is it addressing unbelievers or presenting a hypothetical situation. It addresses Hebrew Christians in danger of making a

terrible choice to abandon their forward progress in faith to return to Jewish rituals. They would lose forever the progress they would have otherwise made and would suffer God's severe judgment.

Hebrews 10:27. The believer who sins willfully has in store a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which devours the adversaries.³⁷ This willful sin is the same as in Hebrews 6:1-20, a turning back to sinful Judaism which would be tantamount to giving one's approval to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.³⁸

Before we discuss the fire imager^{39y}, we first note that God's discipline of believers can be fearful. Christians can face a fearful judgment either temporally or at the Judgment Seat of Christ (or both). In Acts 5:1-42 when Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead by God because they lied, great fear came upon all the church? (Acts 5:11). The Judgment Seat of Christ can also be a fearful prospect for those who have not lived well.⁴⁰ The fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries? (Acts 5:27 *pyros zelos*, literally fiery zeal? or fire of zeal?) refers to the zeal of God's judgment toward sin. Believers can experience the same zeal of judgment toward their sin as God's enemies experience toward theirs, though the results are different. This part of Acts 5:27 is from Isaiah 26:11, a prophecy of God's judgment against His covenant people. However, as Tanner notes, The fire is a threat to the unrighteous within the nation, but not to the righteous.⁴¹ The worse punishment? of Acts 5:28 is compared to the death penalty for the presumptuous sin of Numbers 15:30-31,⁴² which was the severest penalty dictated at that time. Is there a punishment worse than death? Absolutely! Suffering in this life can be so terrible that some people would rather die to find relief.⁴³ Furthermore, the fire of the Judgment Seat of Christ burns away a believer's unworthy works causing forfeiture of rewards for all eternity. ⁴⁴ In the end, those who would be judged are still His people? (Numbers 15:30). This is a quote from Deuteronomy 32:35-36 : The Lord will judge His People.? In that passage God will not only judge the enemies of His people, but based on His impartiality He will also judge His own people when they forsake His covenant. With great privilege comes great responsibility. Bruce comments, The privileges which Israel enjoyed as God's covenant-people meant that their responsibilities were greater and that retribution would be the more severe in their case if they gave themselves up to unrighteousness.⁴⁵ These who sin will not fall into hell, but into the hands of the living God? (Deuteronomy 32:31). Though it is a fearful? prospect, at least they will be in His hands not out of them. Finally, the contrast between destruction (*apoleia*, or ruin?)⁴⁶ and saving of the soul? (literally, preserving of the life?)⁴⁷ in Deuteronomy 32:39 could speak of physical life and death or contrast a ruined life with a life that is delivered from the consequences of a negative judgment. This warning which mentions fire is meant to picture the terrible consequences that believers face if they should willfully turn away from Jesus Christ. The consequences are spiritually devastating, even more painful than death, but eternal hell is not mentioned. It is conceivable that the readers, Hebrew Christians being tempted to re-identify with sinful Israel, might also understand this as a warning about the impending national judgment of a fiery destruction of Jerusalem which occurred only a short time later (A.D. 70), something they would know about from Jesus' warnings (Matthew 23:27-39, Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6; cf. Acts 2:40).

Hebrews 12:29. The third warning that mentions fire contrasts the fearful scene at Mount Sinai when the Law was received with the readers who are assured that they have come to experience Jesus Christ and the salvation of the New Covenant. The Jewish Christians readers have a much

more privileged position than those Jews who received the law. With greater privilege and revelation comes greater responsibility. The readers cannot ignore God's warnings. There will be no escape from the consequences for failure to persevere in godly faithfulness. That God is a consuming fire? is a motivation to practice gracious godly reverence in God's service, which was mentioned in the previous verse (Hebrews 12:28). This cannot be a threat of hell, because Hebrews 12:28 speaks confidently of the readers receiving a kingdom.? This metaphor of God as a consuming fire comes from Deuteronomy 4:24 where it speaks of God's jealous judgment. He is jealous for Israel's devotion and will judge them if they turn from His covenant to worship idols.

Conclusion The interpretation of the fire imagery in Hebrews not only impacts interpretation of the epistle as a whole, but shapes theological and pastoral concerns. It is very clear that Hebrews, including the warning passages, was written to believers. The three warnings in Hebrews that mention fire do not refer to hellfire but to a severe judgment for believers. When we see how fire and fire imagery is used in the Bible, we find that though it used for the fiery punishment of unbelievers, it is often used as a threat or punishment against those who are called God's people. While one aspect of fire is the judgment of hell, we also find it used for God's temporal discipline of His people characterized by His anger, zeal, and jealousy or used of trials that test or purify believers. These facts should inform our interpretation of the nature of the judgments in the warnings of Hebrews rather than have the obscure language used in the warnings determine the spiritual state of the readers. Fire also characterizes a future judgment of works at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Another possibility is that the fire in these warnings was understood by the readers as the fiery destruction of Jerusalem which happened a short time after this book was written, a judgment on Israel for rejecting and crucifying Jesus Christ. In any case, believers don't need to fear burning in hell, but they should fear an experience of God's burning anger if they willfully turn away from the benefits of the eternal salvation which Jesus Christ provided through His death and resurrection.

References:

1Charles C. Bing is the founder and president of GraceLife Ministries, Burleson, Texas.

2For the purpose of this study, when we speak of eternal damnation or a similar concept, we will not distinguish between those who view the final eschatological condemnation of unbelievers as eternal punishing (traditional view) and eternal punishment (annihilation view). Some commentators who see eternal condemnation as the judgment in view: F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); Wayne Grudem, *Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Other Warning Passages in Hebrews*,? in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 133-82; Homer Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 205; John MacArthur, *Hebrews*, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1983); Scott McKnight, *The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions*,? *Trinity Journal* 13 (Spring 1992): 34-36; Stanley D. Toussaint, *The Eschatology of the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews*,? *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (Spring 1982): 68.

3Randall C. Gleason, *The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8*,? *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (January-March, 1998): 89-90; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Apostles' Use of*

Jesus' Predictions of Judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70, in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, ed. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 140-141; and *A Faith that Endures* (Grand Rapids: Discovery, 1992): 173; Peter Walker, *Jerusalem in Hebrews 13:9-14 and the Dating of the Epistle*, *Tyndale Bulletin* 45 (1994): 39-71; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 153.

4 Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), 452-453, 464-466; Gleason seems to allow for this as well as the destruction of Jerusalem: *Old Testament Background*, 86-88; Zane C. Hodges, *Hebrews* in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 795-796, 803-804; Tanner admits this possibility: J. Paul Tanner, 'But If It Yields Thorns and Thistles': An Exposition of Hebrews 5:11-14, Hebrews 6:1-12, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 14 (Spring 2001): 30-32; and *For Whom Does the Punishment of Hebrews 10:26-31 Teach a Punishment Worse Than Death?*, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 19 (Autumn 2006): 73.

5 The Judgment Seat of Christ is understood as a future judgment for believers only where their works and faithfulness are evaluated and rewarded (or denied reward) accordingly. See Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:9-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10. Those who view this judgment as a loss of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ: Dillow, 453-453 (He also allows for temporal judgment); R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 175-182; Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, *The Thorn-Infested Ground in Hebrews 6:4-12*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (July-September 1988): 319-28; *The Danger of Willful Sin in Hebrews 10:26-39*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (October-December 1988): 410-19; and *The Failure to Heed His Speaking in Hebrews 12:25-29*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (January-March 1989): 67-75; J. Paul Tanner, *Hebrews 5:21-6:12*, 40, and *Hebrews 10:26-31*, 73-77.

6 The New King James Version is used unless otherwise noted.

7 McKnight, *The Warning Passages*, 35. See also Buist M. Fanning, *A Classical Reformed View*, in *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 189-190; Robert A. Peterson, *Our Secure Salvation: Perseverance and Apostasy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009), 159.

8 See for example, McKnight's criticism of Nicole's theologically biased interpretation of the state of the readers in Hebrews 6:1-20. McKnight, *The Warning Passages*, 51-53.

9 I use the word *genuine* as a concession to the discussion which demands such clarification. The Bible uses no such qualifiers to describe believers as *genuine*, *real*, *true*, etc. or to disqualify unbelievers as *false*, *insincere*, *temporary*, *spurious*, etc. I believe it can be shown that when the Bible refers to someone as a believer (in the context of Jesus Christ or the gospel as the object), it always intends someone who has believed unto salvation. To conclude otherwise is to impose one's theology on the given text rather than allow it to speak for itself.

10 For example, R. C. H. Lenski, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 174-187, 355-357; I. Howard Marshall, *The Problem of Apostasy in New Testament Theology*, *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 14 (1987): 68; Clark Pinnock, *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1989), 17. Bateman claims that all contributors to the book *Four*

Views, which includes the views of Classical Arminianism (Grant R. Osborne) and Wesleyan Arminian (Garreth Lee Cockerill), as well as Classical Reformed (Buist M. Fanning), and Moderate Reformed (Randall C. Gleason), believe that the recipients of Hebrews are true believers (Four Views, 24).

11For example, Gleason L. Archer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 40; Bruce, 118-19; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 215; John MacArthur Jr., *Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 135-149; Roger Nicole, *Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of God with the Saints,*? in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 362; Peterson, 175; Toussaint, *Eschatology of the Warning Passages,*? 68.

12For example, Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 145-147; Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Tyndale, 1960), 108, 111; Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 113; Westcott, 165; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Hebrews Six in the Greek New Testament,*? *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119 (January-March 1962): 52.

13See Matthew 5:22; Matthew 13:37-50; Mark 9:43-48; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Jude 1:7; Revelation 14:10-11; Revelation 19:20, Revelation 20:10, Revelation 20:14-15, Revelation 21:8. Interestingly, it is difficult to find in the Old Testament a reference to eternal hellfire. Isaiah 66:24 is usually thought to be behind the references to Gehenna? and eternal punishment in passages like Mark 9:43-48, but as we will see, the imagery of fire was commonly used for temporal judgment in the Old Testament. Also, Isaiah's image of the worm devouring decaying bodies in the grave is used elsewhere for an activity in time, not eternity (Job 17:14-16; Job 34:19-20). Not all commentators see all New Testament references to Gehenna? as an automatic reference to eternal punishment. See W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: A New Translation and Introduction*, in *The Anchor Bible*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 60ff; Adam Clarke, A., *Clarke's Commentary: Matthew*, electronic ed. (Logos Library System, 1999), s.v. Matthew 5:22;? Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 206-207; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPEK, 1996), 332-368, 445. 14:10-11; 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8.

14 John 5:24; John 10:28-30; John 17:9-12; Romans 8:28-39; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30; Note also the teaching of Hebrews on eternal security: 7:25; 9:14-15; 10:14.

15See note no. 6.

16See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest,*? *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130 (April-June 1973): 141-50; and Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, *The Kingdom Rest in Hebrews 3:1-4:13,*? *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (April-June, 1988): 185-96.

17These arguments are adapted from an article by John Hosler, *Were the First Century Hebrew Christians in Danger of Losing Salvation and Falling into Hell Fire?,?* http://www.napierchurch.org/pdf/articles/bible_study/falling_from_grace.pdf (accessed December 19, 2009).

18Others who argue that the readers of the warnings are regenerate include Bateman et al. in *Four Views* (see note no. 10); Dillow, 435-444, 459; Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (InterVarsity 1995), 212-217; Kendall, 175-182; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 141; Tanner, *Hebrews 5:11-14*, *Hebrews 6:1-12*,? 30-32, and *Hebrews 10:26-31*,? 57-77; Oberholtzer, in his previously cited series in *Bibliotheca Sacra* vols. 145 (1988) and 146 (1989); Andy M. Woods, *The Paradigm of Kadesh Barnea as a Solution to the Problem of Hebrews 6:4-6*,? *Chafer Theological Journal* 12 (Spring 2006), 50-62.

19McKnight, *The Warning Passages*,? 26.

20From *parapipto*, to fail to follow through on a commitment, fall away, commit apostasy,? *BAGD*, 3rd Ed. (2000).

21Bruce, 122-124; Lenski, 185-186; McKnight, *The Warning Passages*,? 26, 39-42.

22From *pipto*, *BAGD*, 3rd Ed. (2000).

23Gleason, *Old Testament Background*,? 62-91; Woods, *The Paradigm of Kadesh Barnea*,? 44-70.

24See 10:19-39; 12:1-4. The historical occasion could be the persecution of Christians under Roman emperor Nero.

25It is best to take the aorist participle *parapapesontas* not as conditional, but as concessive by implication. Hughes quotes the New English Bible approvingly: for when men have once been enlightened ? and after all this have fallen away ?? Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 212, n. 56. Other Scriptures show that believers can harden their hearts to the point of abandoning their faith (Luke 8:13; 1 Timothy 1:19; 2 Timothy 2:18).

26Paul Ellingsworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 664; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 385.

27Gleason, *Old Testament Background*,? 64; Lane, cxii-cxxiv.

28See note no. 13.

29 Jude 1:11 is not commenting on whether those who followed Korah were punished eternally, but that they were punished suddenly and severely in their deaths. Jude uses the aorist tense in *perished?* (*apolonto*) to emphasize that judgment of the false teachers is likewise certain.

30Some think that the term *flames of fire?* is a play on the name of Yahweh. See the NASB and the comment in *The NET Bible*. If so, this makes the comparison even stronger.

31The context of this passage is not soteriological. In the Upper Room Discourse Jesus is discussing fruitfulness with the saved disciples (15:3) who are compared to branches that are in the Vine, which is Christ (15:1-2). For more discussion see Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A*

Biblical Evaluation and Response, GraceLife Edition (Burleson, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 1997), 36-40.

32Not standing the test, unqualified, worthless,? BAGD, Third ed. (2000). Cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Corinthians 13:5; See Kendall, 173-175.

33So Hodges, 795-796; In this way, it reminds of God's disciplinary judgment intended to make believers holy and fruitful (cf. 12:5-11).

34See Dillow, 453; Oberholtzer, Hebrews 6:4-12,? 326; Tanner, Hebrews 5:11-14, Hebrews 6:1-12,? 40.

35See note no. 3.

36Bruce, 124-125.

37Again, note that the author includes himself as a possibility by using the first person plural we.?

38The author of Hebrews apparently has a particular sin in mind, which becomes evident as we consult the context. He had exhorted his readers previously to hold fast to their confession (3:6; 4:14) and has warned them about the dangers of not pressing on in their faith (6:1-8). He reinforces this concern in the verses immediately preceding this warning about the willful sin (10:23-25). The readers were on the verge of abandoning their confession of faith in Christ and returning to the Mosaic Law and its sacrifices, which is why he discussed the inadequacy of the Mosaic sacrifices especially from chapter 8 onward.

39In reference to the Judgment Seat of Christ mentioned in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 uses the word fear? (phobos).

40Taken appositively by Ellingsworth, 535.

41Tanner, Hebrews 10:26-31,? 71-72. He points out that Isaiah 33:14-15 shows that the righteous in Israel will survive God's consuming fire.

42Ibid., 64-65.

43Cf. Lamentations 4:6, Lamentations 4:9, Jonah 4:3.

44 1 Corinthians 3:13-15. Commenting on the parallel of 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 with the warnings in Hebrews, Gleason remarks, If it is true that believers will face a judgment after death linked to 'fire' that poses no threat to their eternal salvation, then why would we object to temporal fiery judgments experienced in life by genuine believers as divine discipline? For these reasons I find the common assumption that Hebrews warns of eternal damnation unproven. (Randall C. Gleason, Moderate Reformed Response,? in Bateman, Four Views, 255). In my opinion, the severity of these judgments upon believers whether divine chastening in this life and/or loss of rewards for eternity answers the argument that eternal damnation must be in view because Hebrews presents an escalated? judgment (See Fanning, A Classical Reformed View,? in Bateman, Four Views, 189-90).

45Bruce, 263.

46BAGD, Third Ed. (2000).

47The phrase uses peripoiesin (keeping safe, preserving, saving). BAGD, Third Ed. (2000).

01.03. Are Disciples Born or Made? - GraceLife, November 2007

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Are Disciples Born or Made? - GraceLife, November 2007

Synopsis:

Charlie presented this paper at the Evangelical Theological Society's annual meeting in San Diego November 16, 2007. It clarifies the crucial distinctions between how one becomes a Christian and how one becomes a disciple.

Discipleship affects every Christian. Not only are we to be disciples, but we are to make disciples of others. But what is a disciple? The meaning of discipleship has taken on greater significance with the debate over the relationship between salvation and sanctification. For decades a chorus of voices has been calling for a more precise definition of the biblical concept of discipleship while the Church goes on grappling with fulfilling her great commission to "make disciples." Christians have not lacked for books on how to be a disciple or how to make disciples of others. Too often these books are based on assumptions about what a disciple is while they take the meaning of discipleship for granted. Yet our understanding of biblical discipleship shapes our practice of evangelism, church growth, missions, and personal lifestyle. When discipleship is clearly defined, there are generally two different views of discipleship in the evangelical church today. Some believe disciples are all Christians and vice versa (disciples are born), while others hold that disciples are those who have made a commitment to Jesus Christ subsequent to salvation (disciples are made). If discipleship is becoming a Christian, then the church must preach a gospel of commitment, surrender, and sacrifice as conditions of salvation, for these are the conditions of discipleship. To do less is to lead people to a false assurance of salvation. On the other hand, if discipleship is a commitment different from the salvation experience, then to teach a "costly" salvation is to pervert the gospel. This paper is designed to add to our understanding of the concept of disciple and discipleship by examining the words themselves and the relevant passages in the NT. Part 1 examines the key words used to denote discipleship and some important passages where they are found. Then Part 2 examines a biblical model of discipleship, and Part 3 the conditions of discipleship.

Part 1: The Terminology of Discipleship

We will find that etymology is of little help in understanding the theological implications of being a disciple. However, some issues of usage will be very important to our discussion.

I. The Words Used

A. Disciple The word disciple translates the Greek noun *mathetes*, which is found 264 times in the Gospels and Acts. It is not found in the Epistles. The noun has the basic meaning of "a pupil, apprentice, adherent." 1 The verb form, *matheteuo*, occurs four times in the Gospels and once in Acts. It means to "be or become a pupil or disciple." 2 That the meaning of the word disciple is never explained in the NT indicates that the early readers understood it in relation to contemporary

rabbinic or Greek practice. It was used of learners who associated themselves with a teacher, philosopher, or rabbi with the assumption that the pupil would become like his teacher (Matthew 10:25; Luke 6:40) ³ . The greater the student's submission to his master, the greater is the student's transformation and likelihood that he would become the master's successor. The master's ultimate expectation was that each of his disciples would be proficient in his master's teaching ⁴ . In the NT we find followers of various teachers called disciples (of Moses, John 9:28; of the Pharisees, Matthew 22:16; Mark 2:18; of John the Baptist, Matthew 9:14; Matthew 14:12; Mark 2:18; Luke 11:1; John 3:25). Most prevalent in the NT are those called disciples who identified themselves as followers or learners of Christ (e.g., Matthew 5:1; John 4:1; John 8:31, John 9:27-28), especially the twelve chosen as apostles (e.g., Matthew 10:1; Matthew 11:1, Matthew 20:17, Luke 9:1). A disciple is one who puts himself in the position of a learner. In relation to those who learned from Jesus, this definition in and of itself does not distinguish between those who are unsaved, simply saved, or saved and having made a deeper commitment. The particular meaning of disciple in any passage must be determined by the context.

B. Follow The other word which speaks of discipleship in the NT is the verb usually translated "follow" (akoloutheo). It is used over sixty times in the Gospels in reference to following Christ. A parallel thought is expressed by the phrase "to come after" (opiso elthein) in relation to Christ (cf. Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23). Like the word disciple, these terms do not indicate the spiritual condition of the person in view. The Gospels speak both of those who follow Christ in general and of those who follow with more commitment. Large crowds followed Jesus (e.g., Matthew 4:25; Matthew 8:1, Matthew 12:15, Matthew 21:9, Mark 10:32), but there were also individuals called to follow Him in a more intimate relationship (e.g., Matthew 9:9; Matthew 10:38, Matthew 16:24, Mark 2:14, Mark 8:34, Luke 5:27, Luke 9:23).

Some consider the invitation of Jesus to "follow Me" an invitation to salvation. They argue not from the meaning of the word, but from incidents where it is used. After citing several encounters where Christ said "follow Me," Boice concludes, The command to follow Jesus was not understood by Him to be only a mere physical following or even an invitation to learn more about Him and then see if one wanted to be a permanent disciple or not. Jesus understood it as a turning from sin to salvation. ⁵

However, it is clear that Jesus sometimes issued the invitation to follow Him to those who were clearly already believers (e.g., Matthew 8:21-22; Matthew 16:24; John 12:26; John 21:19, John 21:22). Like the term disciple, the significance of follow or come after must be determined from the context.

II. Discipleship in the Gospels

We will now see how the words disciple and follow are used in relation to those who learned from or followed the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels. They are used in a number of ways, which shows that those called disciples had varying degrees of the commitment to learn and submit.

A. Curious followers The broadest meaning of disciple in relation to Jesus Christ comes from those instances where the term may be used of the multitudes who followed Him. For example, in Matthew 5:1 it is unclear whether the multitude is identified synonymously with the disciples or the disciples are a smaller group within the multitude. Likewise, in Luke 6:13 Jesus chooses the twelve

disciples from a larger group of followers also called disciples. In these settings Jesus is teaching and the multitude is willing to be taught, and thus in the general sense they could be called disciples (Matthew 5:2 ff.; Luke 6:20 ff.).

John 6:1-71 contributes an important truth about disciples. While the chapter begins with a distinction between the multitude and the disciples (cf. John 6:2-3, John 6:11, John 6:22), we later learn that among the group of disciples are unbelievers (John 6:65). We are led to assume these unbelievers are a large part of the departing group. However, at least one unbeliever, Judas Iscariot, remains with the twelve disciples (John 6:67). This interchange with Jesus in John 6:1-71 shows that the term disciple in its broadest sense can even refer to unbelievers. They merit the term because outwardly they are followers or learners of Christ, though they may only have the barest personal commitment to Him. In fact, their motivation seems little more than political (John 6:15), or to obtain free food (John 6:25, John 6:34), or simply to satisfy their curiosity. In a comment on this passage, MacArthur admits in a footnote:

It is apparent that not every disciple is necessarily a true Christian (cf. John 6:66). The term disciple is sometimes used in Scripture in a general sense, to describe those who, like Judas, outwardly followed Christ. ⁶ This footnote is a major admission from one who goes on to rigidly espouse discipleship as a complete and total surrender to Jesus as Master of one's life-and equates this with salvation. MacArthur is acknowledging, though minimally, that the context must inform one's definition of discipleship. We see that even those who believe disciples are born agree that the term disciple is flexible enough to refer to unbelievers.

B. Convinced followers

Those disciples who decided to remain with Jesus in John 6:1-71 include the Twelve. Acting as spokesman, Peter confesses their faith in Jesus as the Messiah (John 6:66-69). His statement springs more from a logical and settled conclusion than a vow of personal devotion. These men, except Judas, were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior. At this point in the text, however, we see no deep commitment.

Sometimes we note in the Gospels those who were undoubtedly believers in Jesus Christ, but who were reserved in their commitment to Him. Though obviously committed as well as saved, some, like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, never followed Christ in the sense of leaving their homes and families. John also mentions rulers of the Jews who avoided a full commitment to Jesus Christ as Master (John 12:42-43). ⁷ Apparently, Joseph of Arimathea is one of the rulers who believed. John describes him as "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38). Though John does not call Nicodemus a believer or a disciple, we get the sense from the night time visit in John 3:1-36 and his interest in Jesus' burial, that he was in the same category as Joseph-a secret disciple finally gone public.

Jesus even offered a degree of commendation to those who had less than a full commitment to follow Him as Master (Mark 9:40-41; Luke 9:50).

C. Committed followers The preponderance of references to disciples in the Gospels speaks of those who have submitted to Jesus Christ as Master of their lives. They are committed to following Jesus as their Lord and Teacher in the same sense in which others devotedly followed Moses, the Pharisees, or John the Baptist. In this sense the term disciples is used most frequently in the

Gospels to speak of the smaller group of twelve apostles chosen by Christ (e.g., Matthew 10:1; Luke 6:13). In addition to the Twelve, however, a larger group of seventy is also called disciples (Luke 10:1, Luke 10:17, Luke 10:23). They too appear as those committed to Jesus in a special way since they are sent out by the Lord to preach the Gospel. The commitment involved in this deeper relationship is seen in the various conditions that Jesus attached to discipleship as His ministry progressed. He said that true disciples, or "disciples indeed" (alethos mathetai), are those who "abide in My word" (John 8:31). While a fuller interpretation of this condition will be offered later, it is enough to note here that this condition was stated to those whom the text says had already believed in Christ (John 8:30-31). The word "abide" (from meno) denotes the more intimate relationship that Christ desires of those who believe in Him (cf. John 14:21, John 14:23-24, John 15:4-10). As Jesus began to teach the significance of His work on the Cross, He also expounded other stringent conditions for those who would continue as disciples in the deeper sense. In these conditions (Matthew 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-26; and Luke 14:26-33), Jesus said a disciple must deny himself, take up his cross, follow Christ, lose his life, not be ashamed of Christ, and hate his family and his own life. The nature of these commitments and the fact that they were directed primarily to those who were already His close followers argue that they are conditions not of salvation, but of a deeper relationship to Jesus as Lord and Master. They represent a progression in the revelation of God's will which must be accepted if a believer would continue on the path of discipleship. By these conditions, discipleship becomes something which is very costly to the Christian.

III. Discipleship in Acts In Acts the term disciples seems to be equated with Christians in general (Acts 6:1-2, Acts 6:7, Acts 14:20, Acts 14:22, Acts 14:28, Acts 15:10, Acts 19:10), especially in Acts 11:26 where we read, "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Acts has no explicit mention of the deeper commitment or the conditions of discipleship found in the Gospels. Some would argue from this that there is no difference between a disciple and a Christian; believing in Christ encompasses the commitment to surrender all of one's life to Jesus as Lord and Master and to follow Him in sacrifice and obedience. 8

We must agree that Acts assumes Christians are disciples. Disciple is one of several terms used to refer to Christians and is thus used more technically than in the Gospels. However, the background for Acts cannot be divorced from the Gospels. Whatever conditions for discipleship the Gospel authors recorded must give form to Luke's view of discipleship, especially those recorded by Luke himself. Furthermore, the bridge between discipleship in the Gospels and in Acts is composed of the final missionary commissions of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48). Acts records the fulfillment of these commissions as the Gospel is carried beyond Jerusalem to the remotest parts of the world (Acts 1:8). Discipleship in Acts must be understood in light of Jesus' commission to "make disciples" in Matthew 28:19-20. Since Acts records the disciples' obedience to this command, it is necessary to understand what Jesus means by "make disciples." Is He equating discipleship with salvation? 9 In light of the commission in Matthew 28:19-20, it is natural that Christians should be called disciples in Acts, since Acts is the historical account of the fulfillment of that commission. As a historian writing selectively, Luke describes the early Christians in general as committed followers of Christ who continued in His teaching. He does not concern himself with the few believers who may not have associated with the Church. In Acts the early converts were enthusiastic in their commitment to Christ with but few exceptions. 10

For example, Luke notes how new believers do not hesitate to obey the Lord in baptism, (cf. Acts 2:41, Acts 8:13, Acts 8:36, Acts 9:18, Acts 10:47-48, Acts 16:14-15, Acts 16:33-34, Acts 18:8, Acts 19:5). His historical perception of the early believers was that of a new community following the Christian Way with diligence and the marks of true discipleship as enunciated by Jesus: They continued in the Word (Acts 2:42; cf. John 8:31), showed love for one another (Acts 2:42 and Acts 4:32; cf. John 13:34-35), and were willing to deny themselves worldly gain (Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:32-35; cf. Luke 9:24-25). Furthermore, the stringent conditions of discipleship preached by Christ were not preached by the Apostles in Acts. Indeed, it wasn't necessary, for these early believers were generally viewed as committed to Christ in discipleship. Calenburg notes, The sermons of Acts seemed to reaffirm the distinction between conversion by faith in Christ and committed discipleship. The general use of the term "disciple" for all believers and the practice of many new converts implied [that] committed discipleship to Christ was the common and expected response to His will as taught by the Apostles. 11 That the first Christians were committed as disciples is no surprise in light of the hostile Jewish environment. For a Jew to become a publicly confessed Christian was ipso facto to bear the cross of Christ's suffering through certain persecution, ostracism, or even death.

Christians are called disciples in Acts, because as Luke sees it, these early believers are committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is every indication that as a whole, these believers were meeting the conditions for true discipleship found in the Gospels.

IV. Discipleship in the Epistles The assumption that Christians were committed disciples in Acts harmonizes with the absence of the word disciple in the Epistles. Conceptually, the idea of discipleship is communicated through the noun "imitator" (mimetes) and the verb "imitate" (mimeomai). 12 Calenburg concludes that "The factors involved in such imitation were similar to the conditions of discipleship, namely, observation, attachment, motivation, submission to authority, and obedience." 13 When Paul exhorts his readers to "imitate me" (e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; cf. Php 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 2 Thessalonians 3:9), he desires a committed response to him as he is committed to and so imitates Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1; cf 1 Thessalonians 1:6). Imitation is therefore the commitment of a believer to follow Christ as a disciple. Bauder observes,

"Imitation" in the NT is consequently not conceived as the reproduction of a given pattern. It is an attitude of thanks in response to the salvation that has been given to us (cf. H. Conzelmann, Epheser, 83). The summons to discipleship can only be fulfilled, when a man is grasped by Christ and undergoes the transformation which existence under the Lordship of Christ involves. 14 To imitate Jesus or Paul is to follow them so as to reproduce their character and behavior. This "Christlikeness" is the goal of discipleship. The Epistles, by implicitly equating discipleship with imitation, affirm that discipleship is the commitment of believers to obey and submit to the authority of Christ. However, since the Epistles never teach that salvation is procured through imitation of Jesus Christ, neither is it procured through discipleship, which is the same thing.

Conclusions from the Terminology In the NT disciple is a somewhat fluid term. It is used of those who obviously had never believed in Christ, of believers with limited commitment, and of believers with the fullest commitment. The ultimate determination of its meaning in any given passage must be the context. Sometimes, as in Acts, consideration of the context involves the perspective of the

whole book. To be a disciple in the broadest sense is to be a follower or learner of Jesus Christ. In the narrower sense used by Christ later in His ministry, it meant to be fully committed to follow and learn from Him in a life of self-denial and obedience to His Word. This latter idea is the most relevant to the present discussion and to our practice as Christians. The stringent conditions Christ attached to this sense of discipleship are not conditions of salvation, but motivations for us who are Christians to move further into God's will.

Part 2: The Model of Discipleship In relation to Jesus Christ, "disciple" was used of those unsaved, those saved, and those saved who have made a serious commitment to Jesus as Lord and Master of their lives. What all three groups had in common that merited the designation disciples was that all were following Jesus Christ to some degree. Discipleship is therefore best understood as a journey, a direction, an orientation of one's life toward becoming like Christ. This can only be accomplished by following Christ. The most common use of the term in the Gospels was in reference to those believers who followed Christ wholeheartedly, especially those who were later called apostles. This fullest sense of discipleship will now be examined. We will look at specific calls to discipleship in the Gospels to see if they are calls to salvation or something more, that is, if they are calls to a life-commitment beyond the issue of one's eternal destiny. The calls we will consider are those that relate to the life of the Apostle Peter, for reasons which will be explained later. First we will summarize the two basic views about the relationship between the call to discipleship and the call to salvation.

I. View 1: Disciples Are Born This view claims the call to discipleship is the call to salvation. The calls are identical. The conditions of discipleship, hard as they may sound, are also the indispensable conditions of salvation. According to this teaching one cannot merely relate to Jesus as Savior, but one must also give total control of his or her life to Jesus as Lord and Master in order to be saved. The term disciple therefore emphasizes the obedience and "costliness" of salvation in contrast to the "cheap grace" purportedly found in "easy believism," which is the name given the opposing view. Likewise, the term follow denotes a commitment to faithfulness and obedience by which true believers can be identified. This view is set forth by a number of Bible teachers and theologians. John MacArthur states, "The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience." 15 He adds, "Every Christian is a disciple. . . . Disciples are people who believe, whose faith motivates them to obey all Jesus commanded." 16 James G. Merritt likewise asserts, The fact is, Jesus sought more than a superficial following; he sought disciples. In short, the evangelistic call of Jesus was essentially a call to repentance and radical discipleship. 17 James Montgomery Boice also argues that discipleship is not a supposed second step in Christianity, as if one first becomes a believer in Jesus and then, if he chooses, a disciple. From the beginning, discipleship is involved in what it means to be a Christian. 18 To support their views these proponents of commitment-salvation appeal to the early calls of Jesus to the first disciples, as we shall see.

Neglecting the demands of discipleship is considered by these and other disciples are made proponents to be an error of the contemporary church. Modern evangelism (they claim) should include a call to follow (=submit and obey) in the proclamation of the Gospel. 19 II. View 2: Disciples Are Made The opposing view, holds that discipleship is a separate issue from salvation. This does not mean that committed discipleship cannot be a continuum originating with one's initial faith in Christ for salvation from sin. Obviously, discipleship should be the logical choice of

those who truly understand the issues of salvation, and often it is. However, the call to salvation is distinct from the call to follow Christ in discipleship. An examination of Christ's calls to discipleship will show that the "Disciples-Are-Made" view is more biblically informed. We will accomplish this by observing how Peter was made a disciple.

A. Peter as a model disciple When we examine the calls of Christ to discipleship in the Gospels, we find ourselves constantly crossing paths with one character in particular, the Apostle Peter. Though the calls to salvation and discipleship can be separated without focusing on the person of Peter, attention to this prominent disciple is helpful in forming a cohesive picture of the progression of discipleship. But a focus on Peter is motivated by more than pragmatic convenience; there is also a theological basis. Peter is presented by the Gospels as the model disciple with whom readers can identify as disciples themselves. This point can be argued from all the Gospels in their general presentation of Peter. Simon Peter was the prominent disciple. Not only is he always listed first (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16), but as the spokesman for the disciples as a group, he represents the consensus of the group's opinion of Jesus and His teaching (e.g., Matthew 16:15-16; Matthew 17:24; Mark 8:29; Mark 16:7; Luke 9:20; Luke 12:41; John 6:67-69). Peter is also given the privilege of being one of the three in Jesus' inner circle along with James and John (e.g., Matthew 17:1; Matthew 26:37; Mark 9:2; Mark 14:33; Luke 9:28).

We see Peter's role as the representative disciple most clearly in Matthew and Mark's presentation of him. In these Gospels Peter serves as the vehicle for Matthew and Mark's message and the point of identification with the readers in their discipleship. His experiences encompass those of a typical believer as his life is presented from the time of initial faith and recognition of Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:40-42), through stages of development, to a fuller understanding of what Jesus' ministry encompassed. In the process, he precipitates Jesus' instruction on what it really means to be a committed disciple. Positively, Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God (Mark 8:27-29) is central to his role as a disciple. But on the negative side, so is his failure to comprehend Jesus' ministry in suffering and death (Mark 8:31-33). Peter's experiences of following Christ take all believers through their own failures and successes.

Peter's name change from Simon also has a representative function in the Gospels. Jesus' new name for him, Cephas in Aramaic or Petros in Greek, means "rock." In spite of his failures, Peter the Rock would represent discipleship. Carsten P. Thiede writes: The early Christians, and this includes the apostles and their pupils, could therefore look to Peter and his experience as a kind of model-Peter was the petros, the rock, not because of his strengths, but in spite of his weaknesses, "deputizing" for the weaknesses of them all. ²¹ For these reasons, when we view the life of Peter, we see the life of a typical disciple as designed by God. This informs us about the nature of discipleship, when it begins, how it develops, and the end toward which it is directed. In short, when we study Peter's life we see the making of a disciple.

B. Peter as a progressing disciple When we study the life and progress of Peter in the Gospels, we find definite stages in his commitment of discipleship based on his responses to Jesus' calls to "follow" Him. As already noted, Jesus' call to "Follow Me" was a call to follow Him in a life of discipleship. The various calls to follow serve as a helpful framework in understanding the progression of discipleship or how a disciple is made.

1. Following in salvation

Peter's first encounter with Christ is described in John 1:40-42. Jesus changed his name from Simon to Cephas (=Peter, John 1:42). Whether Peter was saved here we do not know. But Jesus knew he would be saved and useful to Him. However, Andrew's faith ²² implies Peter's. We know that Peter is at least saved by the time of the wedding in Cana, for there we have the scriptural confirmation that "[Christ's] disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11). In neither John 1:1-51 nor John 2:1-25 is there any call for Peter to follow Christ as a disciple. Neither do we find conditions of commitment required by Christ nor any commitment expressed by Peter. The encounter with Peter in John 1:1-51 clearly happened in the early phase of Jesus' ministry. Timing is important in understanding the significance of Jesus' later calls to follow. The story shows that God's first call to unbelievers is a call to salvation.

2. Following in commitment The first call to Peter to follow in discipleship is issued in Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:14-20, in Galilee (Matthew 4:12, Matthew 4:18, Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14, Mark 1:16, Mark 1:21). Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, to become "fishers of men." Is this episode also a call to salvation?

Some believe it is. Boice assumes this interpretation to support his argument for commitment-salvation: ²³ There is no dispute that in these passages Jesus is calling Peter and the others to a further commitment of discipleship. The command "Follow Me" and the promise that they will become "fishers of men" correctly denote the obedience and submission essential to discipleship. However, there is no support for Boice's assumption that this encounter is either chronologically or theologically parallel with the first encounter of Jesus with Peter and the other disciples in John 1:1-51.

Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:14-20 could not possibly be the same event described in John 1:35-42, which is clearly Jesus' first encounter with Peter and the other disciples. In John 1:1-51 the setting is Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 1:28), not Galilee, as in Matthew and Mark (cf. John 1:43). In John there is no mention of a seaside setting nor of fishing for men. Furthermore, Peter is brought to Jesus (John 1:41-42) rather than being already present as Jesus walked by (Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16). Finally, in the first chapter of John, Peter is obviously introduced to Jesus for the first time, while Matthew and Mark's accounts report no introduction of the men to Jesus, and appear to assume a degree of familiarity with Jesus.

Many commentators agree that Matthew and Mark's accounts of Jesus' call to follow and become fishers of men presuppose the facts of the John 1:1-51 encounter. ²⁴ Since Peter was saved in John 1:1-51 or at latest by John 2:1-25 (see John 2:11), then the call to follow in Matthew and Mark cannot be a call to salvation. A number of commentators agree. ²⁵ After salvation, Jesus calls those who have believed to a life of evangelism.

3. Following in obedience

Another time we find Peter following Christ is in the seaside account described in Luke 5:1-11. After a lesson in obedience, Jesus tells Peter, "From now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10), and the text notes that Peter and his companions "forsook all and followed Him" (Luke 5:11). The story has many similarities to the seaside call in Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45 and not surprisingly, some have interpreted it as a parallel account. Some who believe disciples are born argue that

Christ is calling Peter to salvation in such a way that it includes Christ's lordship over him (Mark 1:8) and the forsaking of everything. Merritt argues from Luke 5:1-11 that part of obedience is the evangelistic task and that if one is not fishing for men, he is not following, i.e., he is not saved. 26 Merritt's equation of this episode with Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45 and his interpretation of them as a call to salvation virtually forces him to include evangelism as a condition of salvation.

Just as John 1:1-51 was shown to be different from Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45, so also Luke 5:1-39 can be shown to be different from Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45. Admittedly, there are some similarities, such as the seaside setting in Galilee, the context of fishing, and the immediate response of the fishermen who follow Jesus. However, there are many differences. 27 The model of a disciple who is made displays a progression of commitment requiring continual challenges or calls to become more of a disciple. This progression is seen in some of the details of Luke's account. For example, Jesus does not actually call Peter to follow here, yet Peter follows. Evidently Peter already knew the Lord's will, for earlier Jesus did actually call him to follow (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:14-20). For Peter, the question was one of total submission to that call. Indeed, Luke notes that in this instance he "forsook all," while Matthew and Mark both note that he only left the boat and his father. Jesus' words also seem to mark a progression, for while in Matthew the promise is "I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19) and in Mark "I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17), in Luke Jesus moves from the future promise to the initiation of a present fulfillment when He says, "From now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10). Jesus could say this now that Peter had learned the lesson of submission and obedience. A number of commentators have noted this obvious progression in discipleship in the Gospels. 28 As we examine the calls of Christ to discipleship in Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45, and later in Luke 5:1-39, we find no mention of the Gospel, no call to believe unto salvation. The calls were, after all, to become fishers of men as they followed Christ in obedience. Peter initially followed with some enthusiasm (Matthew 4:1-25; Mark 1:1-45), but not with the submission and obedience he finally manifests in Luke 5:1-11. Jesus calls those who are his disciples to submissive obedience.

4. Following in sacrifice

Now that Peter has learned his first lesson in submission and obedience, Jesus advances him in the school of discipleship with a lesson on what it really means to be a disciple. On the occasion of Peter's climactic confession (Matthew 16:13 f.; Mark 8:27 f.; Luke 9:18 f.), Jesus instructs all the disciples in the conditions or cost of continuing in discipleship. Though all the disciples are addressed, Peter becomes the principal character in precipitating this instruction. The interesting juxtaposition of Jesus addressing Peter as "Blessed" (Matthew 16:17) and then as "Satan" (Matthew 16:23) shows that, though Peter was saved, he was limited in his understanding of suffering in relation to discipleship. He is praised for his proper understanding of who Jesus is, but rebuked for his lack of understanding about what Jesus must do in following the Father's will. Peter's incomplete comprehension of Christ's submission to God's will indicates a parallel deficient comprehension about what it means to be a disciple submitted to God's will in the fullest sense. This prepares the way for Christ's well-known instructions about the cost of discipleship. The many conditions listed in Matthew 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-38; and Luke 9:23-27 (cf. also Luke 14:25-33) are considered conditions for salvation by those of the "disciples are born" view. 29

Much can be said about how each of the specific conditions cannot refer to salvation. Here we make only some general observations in relation to Peter. First, the conditions are spoken to him as a believer. As shown, his faith is affirmed by the Scripture (John 2:11), and he has received the approbation of Jesus for his confession of faith (Matthew 16:17-19). Peter has been following Jesus since the two seaside calls and is included in the "disciples" whom Jesus addresses (Matthew 16:21, Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:33-34). What sense does it make to have Jesus telling Peter and the disciples-men who were already believers-how to be saved?

Second, the language Jesus uses to speak of the ultimate goal of the conditions is language not used of salvation. We have already seen that in the progression of Peter's relationship to Christ, the call to "follow" is a call to discipleship, not salvation. In giving the conditions of discipleship, Jesus again uses the term "Follow Me" (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). Jesus also says that anyone who does not meet His conditions "cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-33). Clearly the issue is discipleship and following, not faith and salvation. Another important term used in these passages is "come after Me" (erchomai plus opiso) found in all three Synoptic Gospels for those who would meet the conditions of discipleship (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; Luke 14:27). This term is significant because it is seen here as essentially equivalent to "follow" and the idea of discipleship. Perhaps more significant is that it is different from the language Jesus uses to invite people to salvation, which is "come to Me" (erchomai plus pros). 30

Jesus was not telling Peter how to be saved, but what it means to be a disciple in the fullest sense. Peter was already a disciple, but every disciple is challenged to a fuller commitment in his walk with the Lord. If the challenge is rejected, the believer has, in effect, ceased following. For Peter, who does not fully comprehend Jesus' obedience to the Father, it is time to challenge his incomplete comprehension of discipleship with specific conditions. Obedient disciples can expect Jesus to challenge them with a call to the deepest sacrificial commitment.

5. Following in failure The next stage of Peter's discipleship finds him faltering in following the Lord. During the final Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus told Peter, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward" John 13:36). Peter, who still trusted in his own strength to enable him to follow Christ, objected to the pronouncement (John 13:35). Jesus, of course, was predicting Peter's infamous three-fold denial during His arrest (John 13:38). The "now afterward" contrast shows this to be a temporary interruption due to impending and difficult circumstances. But Jesus also promised him, "You shall follow Me afterward" (John 13:36). The fulfillment of our Lord's prediction is in John 18:15-27. In this account, there is positive identification of Peter as still a disciple. The one accompanying Peter to the courtyard of the High Priest, usually assumed to be the disciple John, is called "another disciple" (John 18:15) or "the other disciple" (John 18:16), thus identifying Peter as a disciple to the reader. Not only that, but it is said that Peter "followed Jesus" (John 18:15). The denial itself also makes Peter's discipleship the issue. The servant girl, the servants, and the officers all ask him if he is one of Jesus' disciples. (John 18:17, John 18:25). Meanwhile, the reader is told that the high priest was asking Jesus "about His disciples" (John 18:19). While Peter is denying the fact that he is a disciple of Jesus, the reader is shown that, to a certain degree, Peter really is following. After all, he did follow Christ thus far, in contrast to most of the other disciples.

Even Peter's failure shows progression in his following. Though he ceases to follow for a short time, he does not really cease to be a disciple. It was not his discipleship that failed, but his courage. The disciple who is progressing may falter during tests of his faith. Jesus allows His followers to fail in order to show them their weaknesses and so that "afterward" they will trust in His power instead of their own.

6. Following in service The last stage in the progression of Peter's discipleship occurs after the resurrection when Jesus appears to Peter and six other "disciples" in Galilee (John 21:1-2). Peter had returned to his familiar activity of fishing. It is certainly no coincidence that Peter's activity of fishing forms the backdrop for a further challenge to discipleship. In contrast to Luke 5:1-39, however, Peter does not object to the Lord's command to let down the net on the right side of the boat (Luke 21:6), demonstrating that he has learned the lesson of obedience.

Jesus' calls to "Follow Me" (Luke 21:19, Luke 21:22) come both after the three-fold commissioning of Peter to a shepherding ministry and after a description of how Peter would die (Luke 21:18). The dialogue shows that Peter is now restored in his relationship with the Lord. Now that Peter is resigned to God's will to the fullest degree and has forsaken self-reliance, Jesus is free to tell Peter how he will die. Peter now understands that discipleship means laying down one's life. When Jesus concludes the revelation and says to Peter, "Follow Me," He is calling him to minister and to die in his service to others. Surely to Peter the words had more significance than ever. At each stage in the life of a disciple the call to follow has progressively deeper significance.

Jesus called Peter to follow a second time in this interchange (Luke 21:22). This second time emphasizes the single-minded devotion necessary to follow Christ in ministry. Jesus wants each disciple to follow in his own way regardless of what others do.

It should now be obvious that the call to follow cannot be the same as a call to salvation. Such a thought is foreign to this last segment of the Gospels' record of Peter's life. Peter was called to follow throughout his life and all the calls were after he had believed.

Conclusions from the Model of Discipleship The biblical model of discipleship shows that it is a progressive journey subsequent to salvation. In Peter's life after he believes in Jesus Christ for salvation, we see a funnel effect. The progressive calls to follow begin with a general direction and commitment, but become more and more specific in what that commitment entails. Each time the disciple is called to follow, new significance is attached. With each call, the disciple is challenged to a deeper commitment and a greater sacrifice. This supports the understanding of discipleship as a direction or orientation, not a state. It is a committed and progressive following of Jesus Christ as Master. Anywhere on one's journey toward becoming like Christ one can be called a disciple, even in the midst of a temporary failure. It seems reasonable to state that anyone who rejects the challenge to commit himself to Christ ceases to follow and removes himself from the path of discipleship.

Part 3: The Cost of Discipleship

If the conditions of discipleship are also conditions of salvation, then every Christian is, by definition, a disciple, and salvation, by definition, is costly. If these conditions are not conditions for salvation, then the issue of discipleship must be distinguished from the issue of salvation so that discipleship is truly costly and salvation, truly free. We will now survey the two opposing views of

these conditions.

I. The Two Views A. Disciples are born: The "Costly Grace" view The concept of "costly grace" has appealed to many who think it is the answer to the apathy and worldliness of contemporary Christians. Poe states, "The concern for discipleship did not emerge as a theoretical concept in an academic setting, rather it resulted from the phenomenon of people claiming to be Christians who have no interest in the things of Christ." 31 They believe that this problem is solved by demanding that sinners pay a price for their salvation, the price of submission and obedience. J. I. Packer's statement exemplifies this position: In our own presentation of Christ's gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and make sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness. In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything. 32 In their thinking, the cost of salvation includes the many conditions laid down by Christ for becoming a disciple, since in their opinion, salvation and discipleship are one and the same. 33 Though they are willing to call salvation costly, they maintain adamantly that salvation is not of works, but a free gift.

B. Disciples are made: The "Free Grace" view This position holds that salvation and discipleship are separate issues. Salvation concerns the sinner's acceptance of the free gift of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins through faith alone. Discipleship concerns the believer's response to the grace received by offering himself to God in submission, obedience, and sacrifice. In salvation, Christ paid the price; in discipleship, the believer pays the price. Therefore, salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. Because they are separate issues, there is no contradiction.

We can now look at the conditions for becoming a disciple in the Gospels to see if they should be taken as conditions for salvation.

II. The Conditions of Discipleship The teachings of Jesus Christ make it plain that discipleship is costly. The matter to be determined is whether the passages which specify the cost of discipleship speak of the requirements for salvation or of a post-salvation commitment to our Lord. The basic conditions of discipleship were given by Christ after Peter's well-known confession and Christ's prediction of His death and resurrection and the story of His transfiguration. The focus of this section will be largely upon the parallel passages Matthew 16:24-27, Mark 8:34-38, and Luke 9:23-26. Other conditions discussed are those found in Matthew 10:37//Luke 14:26; Luke 14:33; and John 8:30-31.

A. The conditions at Peter's confession, Matthew 16:24-27//Mark 8:34-38//Luke 9:23-26

Those who take the disciples are born position assume these conditions are given in an evangelistic occasion. 34 The context shows that the occasion of these sayings is significantly linked to the prediction of Christ's passion and resurrection and His rebuke of Peter which demonstrates to the disciples that He must suffer and be killed as part of God's will for Him (Matthew 16:21//Mark 8:31//Luke 9:22). There was, for Christ, a price to be paid in following God's will to completion and His own glorification. Peter's rebuke of Christ essentially denies that God's will requires such a price. The conditions of discipleship then follow contextually ("Then" [Tote], Matthew 16:24) as the price which must be paid to follow the will of God to completion and share in Christ's glory. 35 In view of the Lord's imminent death, departure, and glorification, these conditions show the way by which the will of God can be fully realized in Christ's absence. The

audience is also significant. Matthew indicates that Jesus addressed His sayings to none other than the twelve disciples (Matthew 16:24). Mark says that Jesus "called the people (ochlos) to Him, with His disciples also" (Mark 8:34). The crowd is not specifically identified, but in Mark's use of ochlos, when there is enough evidence to determine their disposition, the crowd with Jesus is presented as at least curious enough to follow Him. More often, they are characterized as enthusiastic followers, teachable, exhibiting faith in their midst, and sometimes seeming totally sympathetic to Christ as if they were believers. 36 Luke records that Jesus spoke "to them all" (Luke 9:23), the nearest antecedent of which is the Twelve (Luke 9:18), 37 but possibly He spoke to the Twelve and the multitudes. 38 In Luke 12:1 Jesus is described as teaching His disciples "first" in the presence of an "innumerable multitude." It is therefore reasonable to assume that in the Synoptics, when Jesus spoke to the multitudes (who to various degrees were followers), He was first teaching His twelve disciples, and secondarily His other followers.

If Jesus addressed primarily His twelve disciples, who (except for Judas) were definitely saved, 39 and the crowds who were at least sympathetic or at most contained many followers whose exact commitment to Christ is left undefined, then it is reasonable to assume these sayings should apply to the issues of a deeper relationship with Him and not to salvation. It would be pointless for the Synoptic authors (especially Matthew) to focus on the disciples if these were conditions of salvation. We would expect such conditions to be announced when the disciples first met Jesus. A brief examination of each of these conditions will demonstrate whether they apply more appropriately to the Christian life or to salvation.

B. The conditions The conditions for discipleship must be interpreted in light of the preceding prediction of Jesus' suffering and death. As it cost Jesus to follow the Father's will, so it would cost His disciples to do the same. As we shall see, sometimes there is agreement about the substance of the condition, but the focus of the debate is on whether these are conditions for salvation or for a deeper commitment of discipleship. Also, it should be noted that the requirements are for anyone who desires to "come after" Christ (Matthew 16:24//Mark 8:34//Luke 9:23). As noted earlier, "come after" (opiso elthein) denotes discipleship. It clearly describes a process, not an event; a committed life of following after Jesus rather than coming to (proselthein) Him for salvation.

"Deny himself." This is best interpreted by what the disciples have just heard about Christ's fate. Jesus was about to submit Himself and His own desires to the desire of the Father for Him, which was suffering and death. To deny oneself refers contextually to being mindful of the things of God, not the things of man (Matthew 16:23//Mark 8:33). In Stott's understanding, one "must repudiate himself and his right to organize his own life." 40 Gentry argues the significance in relation to salvation: "A person who truly receives Christ as Savior is in effect denying himself and his wants as nothing and Christ as everything." 41 MacArthur states, "Anyone who wants to become a Christian-has to face three commands: 1) deny himself, 2) take up his cross daily, and 3) follow Him." 42

While Stott and Gentry understand the substance of the saying, their application of this condition to salvation does not coincide with the real issue in salvation, which is the forgiveness of sin and justification of the sinner. But in harmony with the context, Jesus is not addressing these issues here. He speaks of denying oneself that which would obstruct the fulfillment of God's will in the course of following Him. In the passages that deal unquestionably with eternal salvation, there is

no mention of self-denial, or one's "right to organize his own life," or one's "denying himself his wants" as a requirement for salvation. 3

"Take up his cross." Stott argues that to take up the cross is to make oneself as a condemned man, apparently in the sense of living for Christ instead of self. 43 Boice sees cross-bearing as "saying yes to something for Jesus' sake." Specifically, Boice declares that cross-bearing involves prayer, Bible study, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, receiving strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners, and witnessing. 44 In light of the context, it appears that Jesus is expecting the disciples to suffer hardships in order to do God's will just as He does by submitting to the Cross. For Him and for the disciples, it meant they were like men condemned to die, who carry their cross-beams to the place of execution in submission to a higher authority. 45 If this is applied to unbelievers, then the Gospel message is a demand to be willing to die for Jesus.

Stott's interpretation and the practical considerations may be correct, but that they refer to a condition of salvation for unbelievers is untenable, for then salvation would be by suffering, by a willingness to die for Christ, and thus by works, as Boice's particulars demonstrate. This contradicts the Scriptures which speak of the necessity of Jesus Christ suffering so that sinners could be saved apart from works. 46 The sinner's willingness to suffer is not a condition of justification. Also, the unbeliever has no cross in the sense of self-mortification (contra Stott), for he is already dead in sins (Ephesians 2:1-2); nor do unbelievers, by definition, have a cross in the sense of Christian duties (contra Boice).

Furthermore, Luke adds the qualifier "daily," which shows this could not refer to salvation because it refers to something that is done repeatedly. If this characterizes saving faith and is a condition for salvation, one must repeatedly place his faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord through daily surrender. In other words, salvation would not occur at a point in time. Such a condition is not found elsewhere in the Bible and makes both salvation and assurance impossible.

"Follow Me." As discussed earlier, this phrase speaks of discipleship and denotes the pupil/master relationship. Here Jesus invests the term with the significance of following Him by obeying God's will, that is, by self-denial and taking up the cross, as Stott agrees. 47 Because following another person is a process, a progression, and requires time, this condition cannot speak of entrance into salvation. This would promote salvation by the imitation of Christ or by adherence to His example, which would be a salvation of works. It is best taken as a term that describes a continuously committed lifestyle.

"Loses his life." An explanatory statement ("For") follows the three conditions. Jesus says, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (Luke 9:24; cf. Matthew 16:25//Mark 8:35; and Matthew 10:39). To lose one's life explains in summary form what it means to deny oneself, take up one's cross, and follow Jesus Christ in submission to God's will. The background of Jesus losing His life physically (on the Cross) and thus metaphorically (to the will of God) has been observed in the previous context (Matthew 16:21//Mark 8:31//Luke 9:22). Therefore, those who are to be disciples must also lose their lives to the will of God. If a man chose not to deny himself and not to pursue the will of God, but to pursue his own selfish and worldly desires, he would lose his soul (i.e., his life; Matthew 16:26; cf. Mark 8:36// Luke 9:25).

Here some point to the phrase "save his life" and "loses his own soul," and the consequence "destroyed" or "lost" (in Luke) to say that the passage speaks of eternal salvation. 48 However, the verb save (sozo) often does not refer to eternal salvation. It is probably used here in the general sense of "rescue, preserve from danger" 49 or "deliver," 50 i.e., save from a life of self-denial and cross-bearing, 51 for this thought explains ("For," gar) the impact of the previous conditions.

Likewise, "life" (psyche) does not automatically refer to the eternal soul only. The parallel in Luke 9:25 replaces Matthew and Mark's "life" with "himself" (heauton). The noun psyche is frequently used in Scripture in the sense of the essential life of man. 52

Furthermore, unless the context is clearly proved to be soteriological, the verbs "destroyed" (apollymi in Matthew) and "lost" (zemioo, in Matthew and Luke) should retain their respective general meanings of "ruin, destroy, lose" 53 and "suffer damage or loss, forfeit, sustain injury." 54 When Jesus says "whoever loses his life for My sake," the sense is certainly not eternal destruction, for He says this one will then "find it," which is something good. Conversely, it fits well that what one may lose when he tries to save his life (preserve himself from the hardships of self-denial and cross-bearing) is life in the essential qualitative sense (i.e., experiencing God's life in this life, John 17:3), not the eternal soul. The paradox Jesus used has great meaning. What He appears to be saying is this: "Whoever desires to preserve himself from the hardships of God's will of self-denial and cross-bearing will in fact forfeit the essential quality (= true spiritual value) of the present life he is trying to preserve. On the other hand, whoever forfeits himself to God's will of self-denial and hardships will discover the greater essential quality (spiritual value) of the present life he was willing to forfeit." This interpretation would therefore not describe eternal salvation, but a higher quality of experience with God in this life, with implications for the eschatological life, as the next section will show.

"Whoever is ashamed of Me." Mark and Luke state a negative condition that if anyone is ashamed of Christ and His words, Christ will also be ashamed of that person at His coming (Mark 8:38/Luke 9:26). Matthew 16:27 does not mention shame, but can be correlated with Matthew 10:32-33, 55 where the condition is stated in terms of confessing and denying Christ, 56 and is claimed to be a condition of salvation by some of the "disciples are born" perspective. 57 The idea of being ashamed of Christ or denying Christ is clarified in some contexts more than in others. In Luke this saying follows a warning about one who positions himself with the world for the sake of gain (Luke 9:25). It thus explains ("For," gar) the eschatological consequences which face those who desire the world. The same could be said of this saying in Mark 8:38, with the exception that Jesus adds the helpful phrase "in this adulterous and sinful generation." The shame therefore seems to imply a denial of one's identification with Christ in the face of the pressure to live for and identify with the world. In Mark the "For" appears to connect Mark 8:38 with Mark 8:35, expanding the idea of one's relation to this world and its consequences.

Perhaps the greatest clarification comes from the parallel thought of Matthew 10:32-33, where the context is developed more fully. There Jesus is giving instructions to the Twelve before sending them out to preach the Gospel (Matthew 10:5 ff.). He warns of rejection and persecution (Matthew 10:16-25) and encourages them not to fear (Matthew 10:26-31). Matthew 10:32-33 are also followed by similar warnings about rejection (Matthew 10:34-36). In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus is both encouraging and warning in the face of the fear of persecution. He wants the disciples to

know that anyone who identifies with Him will be rewarded, while anyone who shrinks from this will be denied by Christ before the Father (explained below). Matthew's context seems a close parallel to that which is signified by Mark's phrase "in this adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38). The consequence facing someone who is ashamed of or denies Christ is more enigmatic. Does Christ's reciprocal shame and denial of that person at His coming denote a denial of salvation? In correlating Matthew 10:32-33 with Matthew 16:27, it is clear that the issue is some kind of recompense for one's works. Matthew takes care to state that at His coming, Christ "will reward (apodosei) each according to his works" (Matthew 16:27). That Jesus makes works the basis of the recompense demands that salvation not be the issue (Ephesians 2:8-9). Also, the verb apodosei carries the idea of "recompense" with no inherent sense of whether it is good or bad, so it could speak of positive reward or negative judgment. 58 In Mark and Luke a negative recompense is suggested: Those who were too ashamed to identify with Christ will experience Christ's shame. The effect of Christ's shame is not specified, but one could surmise that for a redeemed and now fully-enlightened believer, this would at least produce agonizing regret. In the parallel passage, Matthew 10:32-33, the idea of recompense is good (Matthew 10:32) or bad (Matthew 10:33) accordingly. 59 Christ's confession (or lack of it) in heaven would not relate to the judgment of our salvation, but to an acknowledgment (or lack of it) before the Father of the disciples' unity or fellowship with Christ 60 which is recompensed in an unspecified but appropriate way. (However, one might compare 2 Timothy 2:12, where reigning with Christ is the specific reward.) Conclusions from these conditions

Collectively, all the conditions studied thus far in this section are summarized by the "disciples are born" advocates as demands for submission to Christ as Lord for salvation. 61 There is little disagreement with the interpretations of the demands themselves, only with the application of them to salvation instead of the Christian life. But their interpretation of the conditions cannot evade the charge of salvation by merit. It makes no sense to demand from unbelieving sinners a decision that assumes an understanding of the full significance of Christ's sacrifice, especially at this point in the Gospel narratives before His death (Would Jesus ask an unbeliever to be willing to die for Him?) This would practically preclude anyone from being saved unless he understood the meanings of these conditions-meanings which can best be appreciated in light of salvation, not in prospect of it.

Jesus' teaching on discipleship took place well into His ministry and was addressed primarily to His disciples as a further revelation of the kind of commitment He desired of His already saved followers. He explained these conditions against the background of His own commitment that would lead to His death in order to invest them with the fullest significance for those who also desired to follow God's will.

C. Other conditions

Some other conditions will be considered briefly. Again, the main issue is not usually the interpretation of the condition itself, but whether it applies to Christians or non-Christians.

1. Hate Your Family (Matthew 10:37//Luke 14:26) In another setting, Matthew and Luke add another condition to those who are already considered disciples. In Matthew's account, Jesus says the one who "loves" family more than Him is "not worthy" of Him. In Luke, Jesus says no one can be His disciple who does not "hate" his family and his own life. This condition is troublesome

for many whether it speaks of salvation or of a deeper commitment. As Beare asserts, Jesus was probably using a Semitic figure of speech for hate that means "love less." 62 Jesus must be the object of one's supreme love and devotion if one is to be His disciple. But in both Matthew and Luke, the words are applied to believers only. In Matthew, the saying is in the context of a warning about family members who will be divided over Christ (Matthew 10:34-35). In such a situation, a person who is convinced that Jesus is the Messiah will have his ongoing loyalty tested by those in the family who disagree. This would present a great temptation to choose family ties and harmony over one's identity with Christ. In Luke, the saying is applied to anyone who "comes to" Jesus, which denotes those who believe in Him, as noted earlier.

Therefore, MacArthur rightly interprets the meaning of the idiom itself, "We must be unquestionably loyal to Him." 63 However, this interpretation does not apply to the unsaved, for one more naturally learns love and loyalty on the basis of what Jesus has done in redemption and forgiveness. The Bible teaches that God offers salvation to people as sinners, that is, apart from their love and loyalty to Christ (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 4:10). Even thus softened (as a Semitic figure of speech), such a devoted love for God over blood relationships would be an extraordinary demand for sinners who have had no experience of Christ's redeeming love. It is better understood as truth which brings believers into a deeper relationship with Jesus as Lord through their loyalty to Him.

2. Forsake All (Luke 14:33)

Another condition that Jesus gives is that "Whoever does not forsake all cannot be My disciple." It shares the same context as the condition discussed above (Luke 14:27) and is therefore addressed to believers. Following the illustrations of a builder and of a king who did not make the necessary provision to finish their commitments, this condition demands that a believer commit or surrender whatever possessions are necessary in order for him to follow God's will. "All that he has" translates *pasi tois heautou hyparchousin* which speaks of one's property or possessions. 65 The condition is in absolute terms. Perhaps realizing the difficulty of making this a demand for unbelievers who wish to be saved, disciples are born proponents sometimes soften this and other conditions to a willingness to forsake all. But Jesus did not say one must only be willing. Even if one only had to be willing to do these things for salvation, salvation would be just as conditional and meritorious as if they were actual works. This negates the concept of grace (Romans 4:4). Furthermore, the subjectivity of willingness makes salvation elusive.

3. Abide in His Word (John 8:30-31) This passage will be considered because it is usually thought to be a condition of discipleship spoken to unbelievers. Speaking of Jesus' ministry, John writes, "As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed.'" Many commentators assign Jesus' words to those who had a counterfeit or spurious faith. 66

However, the passage is best understood as a condition of discipleship directed to true believers. It is argued that "believed Him" in John 8:31 indicates inadequate faith by the use of *pisteuo* ("believe") without the preposition *eis* ("in"). But it is obvious that those addressed in John 8:31 are the same as those in John 8:30 who "believed in Him" (*pisteuo eis auton*), which is a strong term denoting salvation. 67 Also, there is overwhelming evidence that *pisteuo* without the preposition does not prove that faith is inadequate for salvation. 68 Salvation is clearly meant in John 8:24

where pisteuo with no preposition is used when Jesus states, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

It is also argued that the hostility of these believers continues (John 8:33 ff.), and Jesus calls them children of the devil (John 8:44). This continuing hostility reflects the opposition of the Jews, which is a major motif of this section. Jesus briefly directing His attention to those Jews who were saved as He taught in the temple. 69 This interpretation is most reasonable because it prevents Christ, who says in John 8:45 "you do not believe Me," from contradicting John, who said they "believed in Him" and "believed Him" (John 8:30-31). It also has greater exegetical and theological consistency than that view which would say these are "believers who did not really believe." The condition for becoming disciples in John 8:31 should not be construed as an admonition to unbelievers. In fact, the opposite is indicated by the emphatic plural pronoun "you" (hymeis) which distinguishes the new believers from the rest of the Jews. 70 Also, Jesus' admonition is not to enter His word, but to abide (meno) or continue in it. The assumption that they are already in His word indicates that abiding is a condition for further knowledge of the truth and freedom in Christ. Discipleship, as abiding in intimacy with Christ, is elsewhere in John made conditional on love and obedience (e.g., John 13:35, John 14:15, John 14:21, John 14:23, John 15:4, John 15:7, John 15:10, John 15:14).

Conclusions from the cost of discipleship Our examination of the conditions of discipleship given in the Gospels show that they are directed toward challenging believers to live lives of obedience, surrender, sacrifice, and self-denial. There is not the slightest evidence that they are intended for unbelievers.

Discipleship is indeed costly, but the cost can only be paid in response to the grace received at salvation. As a believer understands the sacrifice of God for his redemption, he will want to respond to the grace given with a reciprocal commitment. As he learns to also sacrifice, obey, and deny himself, he will become more like the Savior who exemplifies these things. Salvation is by grace; discipleship is costly. The popularized term "costly grace" does not present a paradox, but an absurdity. It is as much a misnomer as "cheap grace."

There is only one kind of grace, and by definition it is absolutely free! The only sense in which salvation is costly is in the fact that Jesus Christ paid the supreme price, His life, for the sinner's redemption. It is unfortunate that some demand of the sinner costly conditions for salvation. To the sinner, salvation is absolutely free. If it were costly to him in any sense, then it could no longer be of grace and Christianity would take its place alongside the rest of the world's religions

Final Conclusion

After examining the terminology of discipleship, the model of discipleship, and the conditions of discipleship, we cannot ignore the various degrees of discipleship presented in the NT. Whether as a minimal commitment or full surrender, discipleship denotes a direction or an orientation more than a state. It is a journey, not an arrival. Anywhere on one's journey toward Christ, one can be called a disciple. Though all disciples find themselves at different points on the journey, the committed disciple is seen as well on the way with his destination clearly in view.

Therefore, we must regard with suspicion those who make absolute statements about what a disciple is or those who make the simplistic charge that some teach that there are two classes of

Christians: ordinary Christians and super-Christians. 71 Though sometimes used to refer to Christians in general (as explained in relation to Acts), the majority of uses by the Lord Jesus indicates that full-fledged discipleship is when a believer fully submits to Christ's Word and Christ's will in all areas of life. From our observations, we find a clear distinction between committed discipleship and salvation which can not be ignored: Salvation is a free gift; intimate discipleship is costly. Salvation relates primarily to Christ as Savior; discipleship relates primarily to Christ as Lord. Salvation involves the will of God in redemption and reconciliation; discipleship involves the whole will of God. Salvation's sole condition is "believe"; discipleship's conditions are abide, obey, love, deny oneself, take up the cross, follow, lose one's life, "hate" one's family, etc. Salvation is a new birth; discipleship is a lifetime of growth. Salvation depends on Christ's work on the Cross for all people; discipleship depends on a believer carrying his or her cross for Christ. Salvation is a response to Christ's death and resurrection; discipleship is a response to Christ's life. Salvation determines eternal destiny; discipleship determines eternal and temporal rewards. Salvation is obtained by faith; discipleship is obtained by faith through works. The difference is the same as that between justification and sanctification. These realities are related, but we do not encourage sanctification before justification. Justification is through faith alone; sanctification is through a life of progressive faithful obedience. Justification can take place apart from sanctification, but sanctification cannot take place apart from justification. With justification comes the Spirit and His power to accomplish sanctification. The sequence of justification before sanctification, salvation before discipleship, or faith before commitment is clearly taught in the Bible. Many verses appeal for commitment on the basis of grace already received (e.g., Romans 12:1; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 2:6; Titus 2:11-12). The grace received in salvation is the basis of further Christian commitment, not vice versa. It is significant that in Titus 2:12 Paul uses a verb to express the idea of how grace trains the believer that is different from the idea usually related to discipleship expressed by *matheteuo*. The verb he chooses (*paideuo*, "teach") is rooted in the Greek idea of training a child (*paidion*). 72 Grace, when received, takes an immature person and trains him toward godliness. This and other NT admonitions to commit one's life to godly principles on the basis of grace received would seem superfluous if such a commitment was understood and made before salvation. The commitment of discipleship is expected of Christians only, therefore, disciples are made, not born.

References

1 A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, compiled by Walter Bauer, trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. 'mathetes,' 486-87.

2 *Ibid.*, s.v. *matheteuo*, 486. This is the intransitive meaning.

3 See also K. H. Rengstorff, s.v. *mathetes*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4:415-41; and Richard D. Calenburg, *The New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship* (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 20-40.

4 Shmuel Safrai, *Master and Disciple*, *Jerusalem Perspective* 3 (November-December 1990): 5, 13.

5 James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 17.

6 John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 196, n. 2.

7 While some might argue circularly that because the rulers did not confess Christ publicly they never truly believed, this would ignore the context and the details of the text itself. Verse 42 begins with a strong adversative (*homos mentoi*) showing that from among the Jewish nation and leadership which did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah (vv 37-41), there were individual exceptions who truly believed. If they were not true believers in Christ, John's contrast is muted and meaningless. John clearly declares that they believed in Him.

8 MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196; Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy*, *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976): 49-79; Charles Price, *Real Christians* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1987), 54.

9 Gentry insists that Matthew 28:19 is simply a fuller account of the commission in Mark 16:15, which says, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He says, The preaching of the gospel summarized in Mark is the making of disciples in Matthew (Gentry, *The Great Option*, 70; See also Boice, *Discipleship*, 159-169; Kent, *Review Article*, 75). But we must take issue with Gentry's equating of the two commissions. If preach the gospel in Mark is a summary of Matthew's make disciples, then preaching the Gospel includes baptizing and teaching obedience as elements that define the Gospel. However, it is clear that Paul did not consider baptism and obedience to all things which Christ commanded part of the saving Gospel (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 2:8-9). The parallel between the two commissions is found in the participle *poroenthentes*, translated in both passages as go. In both places it should be understood as having gone or as you go, which denotes a presupposed or simultaneous activity (Robert D. Culver, *What Is the Church's Commission?: Some Exegetical Issues in Matthew 28:16-20*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 [July-September 1968]: 243-53; D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol.8, 595). For Mark, the main activity is denoted by the finite verb *preach* (*keryxate*), but in Matthew by the finite verb *make disciples* (*matheteusate*). Matthew's go equals Mark's go...preach the gospel as the first step in making disciples. While Mark's commission stops with gospel proclamation, Matthew speaks optimally in making discipleship the ultimate goal, which harmonizes with his emphasis on discipleship in his Gospel. The other participles in Matthew, baptizing and teaching, tell how to make disciples. After the Gospel is believed, baptism is the first step of obedient discipleship, and teaching obedience to the commands of Christ is the means by which believers develop as disciples.

10 Exceptions would be Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:13 ff.), and the Ephesian sorcerers (Acts 19:10-19). Even so, the latter two accounts lead us to believe that these believers would probably continue in Christ's teachings.

11 Calenburg, *Discipleship*, 238-39. See also 197-200.

12 So W. Michaelis, s.v. *mimeomai*, in *TDNT* 4:673; W. Bauder, s.v. *mimeomai*, in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* 1:492.

13 Calenburg, *Discipleship*, 239.

14 Bauder, *Ibid.*

15 MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 21. See also 29-31, 196-98.

16 *Ibid.*, 196.

17 James G. Merritt, *Evangelism and the Call of Christ*, in *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century: The Critical Issues*, ed. Thomas S. Ranier (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989), 145. Also, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Lord of the Saved: Getting to the heart of the Lordship Debate* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P. & R. Publishing, 1992), 67-82.; Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 62-66.

18 Boice, *Discipleship*, 16.

19 E.g., Richard P. Belcher, *A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Salvation Controversy* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990), 94-95; Boice, *Discipleship*, 13-16; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 15-17; John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1958), 108.

20 Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 185. See also his study, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Mathetes*, *Novum Testamentum Supplement* 59 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); and Paul J. Achtemeier, *Peter in the Gospel of Mark in Peter in the New Testament*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, and John Reumann (London: Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, 1974), 62; Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple-Apostle-Martyr. A Historical and Theological Essay*, trans. Floyd Filson, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 25-33; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 332,334; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Figure of Peter in Matthew's Gospel as a Theological Problem*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 72, 80. See also W. S. Vorster, *Characterization of Peter in the Gospel of Mark* *Neotestamentica* 21(1987): 74.

21 Carsten P. Thiede, *Simon Peter: From Galilee to Rome* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988; first published in 1986 by The Paternoster Press), 36. See also Gundry, *Matthew*, 334.

22 The account of John 1:1-51 leads us to believe that Andrew believed in Christ: (1) He followed John the Baptist (John 1:35) and evidently believed John's witness about Christ (John 1:36-37); (2) He followed Christ (John 1:37, John 1:39-40); (3) He believed Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:41; cf. John 20:30-31); (4) In the following story, Philip and Nathaniel obviously believe (John 1:45, John 1:40-50); (5) Andrew's faith is confirmed in John 2:11.

23 Boice, *Discipleship*, 16-17.

24 See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 245-46; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 169-70; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London: Robert Scott, Paternoster Row, 1909), 48; Herman N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, trans. Ray Togtman, *The Bible Student's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 77;

Frederick Louis Godet, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), 1:330.

25 Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus*, trans. J. Raymond Lord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 35; James Donaldson, 'Called to Follow': A Twofold Experience of Discipleship in Mark, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 5 (February 1975), 69; A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 4 vols. (Ohio: Cleveland Bible Truth Depot, 1929), 1:62-63; Ridderbos, *Matthew*, 77.

26 Merritt, *Call of Christ, Evangelism*, 145-46.

27 Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 147. In agreement, see Lenski, *Matthew*, 168-72, and *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 276-77; William F. Arndt, *Luke*, *Concordia Classic Commentary Series* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 155-56; Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, revised ed., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 124; Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), 181; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 279-80.

28 Arndt, *Luke*, 156; Calenburg, *Discipleship*, 121; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 245-47; Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 181; Lenski, *Luke*, 277.

29 E.g., Boice, *Discipleship*, 35-44, 117; Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy*, *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976), 73-75; John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991), 253; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196-202; J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 72-73; John R. W. Stott, *Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior?—Yes*, *Eternity* 10 (September 1959), 18.

30 Cf. John 5:40, John 6:35, John 6:37, John 6:44-45, John 6:65, John 7:37.

31 Harry L. Poe, *Evangelism and Discipleship*, in *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Thom. S. Rainer, 133-44 (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989), 136. It is disturbing that this view appears to originate more from pragmatics than from biblical and theological inquiry. Books by disciples are made teachers consistently begin with a statement of the problem of worldly Christians as a justification for a costly Gospel (e.g., Boice, *Discipleship*, 13; Walter J. Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* [Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970; Reprint, 1985], 13-14; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 16). If the majority of Christians were living committed lives, one wonders if there would be a problem with the Gospel message at all.

32 J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 73.

33 E.g., James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 144; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 29-30, 196-98; Boice, *Discipleship*, 13-23; Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy*, *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976), 76.

34 E.g., see MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 30.

35 See Herman N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, transl. Ray Togtman, *The Bible Student's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 312.

36 For further discussion on the significance of ochlos, see Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), 247-48. William L. Lane comments on Mark 8:34 : By calling the crowd Jesus indicates that the conditions for following him are relevant for all believers, and not for the disciples alone. William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 306.

37 The parallel conditions of Matthew 10:1-42 are stated to the Twelve (Matthew 10:5), while a different passage, Luke 14:26 ff., is addressed to the great multitudes who went with Him (Luke 14:25).

38 Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke. The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 248. The portrayal of the multitudes in general in Luke is very similar to Mark's, although a few times Luke shows Christ's antagonists associated with the term ochlos (cf. 3:7 [but see v. 10]; 5:29; 11:14-15; 12:54-56). Interestingly, Luke sometimes shows that there was a large number (ochlos) of disciples (6:17; 7:11).

39 John 2:11 confirms that the early disciples had believed in Christ. More contextually relevant, the vicarious confession of Peter, which precedes the pericope under consideration, represents the disciples' faith in Jesus as the messianic Savior and the divine Son of God (Matthew 16:16//Mark 8:29//Luke 9:20).

40 Stott, *Must Christ Be Lord?* 18.

41 Gentry, *The Great Option*, BRR 5:174.

42 John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 6.

43 Stott, *Yes, Eternity* 10, 18 44 Boice, *Discipleship*, 40.

45 Lane, *Mark*, 307-308.

46 Cf. Acts 3:18; Acts 17:3, Acts 26:23, Romans 5:6-10, Colossians 1:21-22, Hebrews 13:12, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 Peter 3:18

47 Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 114. Also, I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke. The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1978), 374.

48 Gentry, *The Great Option*, BRR 5,75; Boice, *Discipleship*, 38; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 201-202.

49 So R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 645.

50 See the discussion in Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd ed. revised and enlarged (Dallas: Redenci■n Viva, 1992), 96-101.

51 So M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), 175; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 350.

52 John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1958), 114. See also the NIV translation self in Luke 9:25.

53 BAGD, s.v. apollymi, 94-95. A majority of uses in the NT are clearly not soteriological.

54 Ibid., s.v. zemioo, 339. Instances of its use in other passages never speak of eternal destruction. One eschatological use refers to a believer who suffers loss yet is saved eternally (1 Corinthians 3:15).

55 As Stott (*Basic Christianity*, 117) suggests.

56 Matthew's use of arneomai, deny, basically conveys little different meaning from Mark and Luke's use of epaischynomai, be ashamed. See Marshall, *Luke*, 377.

57 Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 117; Boice, *Discipleship*, 117; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 198-200.

58 Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. apodidomi, 89-90. For clear examples of a good reward, see Matthew 6:4, Matthew 6:6, Matthew 6:18.

59 Recompense, and not salvation specifically, seems to be the context for Matthew's mention of confessing Christ in Matthew 10:32-33. As discussed, the context warns of persecution and rejection (Matthew 10:16-31; Matthew 10:34-36). In such persecution, those who shrink from confessing Christ will be denied the reward of Christ confessing them before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32-33). Furthermore, the issue of one's worthiness (Matthew 10:37-39) implies the idea of merit, which implies either reward or lack of reward. Jesus then spoke of rewards for those who were not ashamed of identifying with Him and His disciples (Matthew 10:40-42; cf. Matthew 5:11-12). In Matthew 10:41-42 Jesus uses the word misthos, which in the majority of its NT usages denotes a positive wage or reward (A Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. misthos, 525).

60 For this idea see Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 1:83; Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels*, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1980), 1:167.

61 Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 114. MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 202.

62 Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 250. See also, C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 577; William F. Arndt, *Luke*, *Concordia Classic Commentary Series* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 344; D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, 257.

63 MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 201. Stott and Boice have similar interpretations (Stott, *Yes, Eternity* 10, 18; Boice, *Discipleship*, 117).

64 Greek English Lexicon, s.v. hyparcho, 845.

65 MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 84. MacArthur is commenting on the lesson learned from the example of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23), which he believes is

summarized by Luke 14:33 (p. 78). This story is preeminently used by Lordship teachers to argue that salvation is costly. E.g., MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 77ff.; Gentry, *The Great Option*, BRR 5:61,75; Arens J. ten Pas, *The Lordship of Christ* (n.p.: Ross House Books, 1978), 5; Elmer R. Enlow, *Eternal Life: On What Conditions?*, *Alliance Witness* (January 19, 1972), 4; Paul Fromer, *The Real Issue in Evangelism*, *His 18* (June 1958), 5; Homer A. Kent, *Review Article: The Gospel According to Jesus*, *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (1989), 71; J. Wallis, *Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience Sojourners* (March 1976), 21-22; Poe, *Evangelism and Discipleship*, *Evangelism*, 138. Chantry structures his whole Lordship presentation around the rich young ruler in his book, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* I believe that the demand Jesus made of the rich young ruler was not a condition of eternal life. However, the argument deserves more space than this article can afford.

66 Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1971), 454. Nearly all commentators who argue for a spurious faith in John 2:23-24 will also argue for it here.

67 Gentry agrees this is a strong term for salvation (Gentry, *The Great Option*, BRR 5:56).

68 Note the absence of the preposition in these soteriological passages: Matthew 9:28; John 5:24; John 8:24, John 11:42, John 13:19, John 14:10, John 17:8, John 17:21, John 20:31, Acts 16:34, Acts 18:8, Romans 4:3, Romans 10:9, Galatians 3:6, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:12, Titus 3:8, 1 John 5:1, 1 John 5:5, 1 John 5:10. That *pisteuo* alone or *pisteuo* with *hoti* (believe that) can denote salvation as easily as the *pisteuo eis* construction is the conclusion of a number of scholars. See Rudolph Bultmann, s.v. *pisteuo*, TDNT, 203; Richard Christianson, *The Soteriological Significance of Pisteuo in the Gospel of John* (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1987), 86-87; Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MO: Trinity Foundation, 1983), 101; Elizabeth Jarvis, *The Key Term 'Believe' in the Gospel of John*, *Notes on Translation* 2 (1988), 46-51; Morris, *John*, 337; E. Herbert Nygren, *Faith and Experience*, *The Covenant Quarterly* 41 (August 1983), 41-42; M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), 221; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:561.69 In light of what has been argued thus far, vv 31-32 show that Jesus is challenging believers to become true disciples. John's commentary in v 30 is inserted before Jesus' remarks to direct the reader to a change of focus by Christ before the opposition resumes in v 33 as a reaction to Christ's remarks. As soon as He finishes His remarks to these believers, the Jews raise another objection, just as they have been doing from the start of the dialogue (cf. 8:13, 19,22,25). The objection of v 33, being totally out of character with the inclination of those mentioned in vv 31 and 32, shows that the identity of those in v 33 is assumed to be the antagonistic unbelieving Jews, not the new believers. This Johannine technique of editorial explanation is further discussed in Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd. ed., 43-44. See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 627-28.

70 *Ibid.*, 628.

71 For example, see Gentry, *Lord of the Saved*, 60; Dallas Willard, *Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?* *Christianity Today* 24 (October 10, 1980), 24 25, 27.

72 Dieter Furst, s.v. paideuo, in NIDNTT, 3:775-79. He comments on Titus 2:11-12 : 'Here too education is an outworking of grace what is being said here is that man is justified by grace and led by it into sanctification (p. 779).

01.04. Are Disciples Born or Made?* - Grace in Focus, May 2005

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Are Disciples Born or Made?* - Grace in Focus, May 2005

Synopsis: Is every Christian a disciple or are the conditions for discipleship different from the condition for eternal salvation? It makes a difference if you want to keep the gospel clear! Is a disciple merely another name for a person who is born into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, or is a disciple a believer who meets specific conditions about following Jesus? Knowing the answer to this question is crucial to understanding the gospel of grace and the Christian life.

The Meaning of Disciple The word disciple comes from the Greek verb *matheteuo* (and noun *mathetes*), which means to be or become a pupil or learner. So the essential meaning of disciple is a learner, which could also be called a follower or an apprentice. In ancient culture, a person would follow a master teacher or craftsman in order to become like him (Matthew 10:25; Luke 6:40). This took a certain commitment from the follower.

The Use of Disciple

Though the prevalent use in the New Testament of *mathetes* is specifically in reference to followers of Jesus Christ, disciple was not just a Christian term. The Bible mentions disciples of Moses, of the Pharisees, and of John the Baptist. In addition, not all of Jesus' followers were born again. Jesus said in John 6:64 to a group of His disciples, "There are some of you who do not believe." Judas Iscariot was one of these unbelieving followers of Jesus. The Book of Acts often uses the term disciples to refer to Christians as a group without distinction about their commitment (Acts 6:1-2, Acts 6:7; Acts 11:26, Acts 14:20, Acts 14:28, Acts 15:10; though see Acts 14:22 where the context shows that committed followers are in view). In light of the Great Commission to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19-20), it would be natural to call believers in Acts disciples to show that the commission was being fulfilled. There are actually few examples in Acts of disobedient believers (cf. Acts 5:1-11; Acts 8:13, Acts 19:18-19). The Epistles never use the word disciple(s). However, the idea is communicated in the commands to imitate and follow mature believers who themselves imitate and follow Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Php 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 2 Thessalonians 3:9).

Discipleship, Unlike Salvation, Is Costly When looking at discipleship passages in the Gospels, we see that in order for one to be a follower of Jesus Christ, he has to meet certain conditions given by the Lord. These include obeying His Word, denying one's own desires, being willing to suffer for identifying with Him, and actively pursuing His will (John 8:31; Luke 9:23). There are other conditions as well. All of these conditions involve a commitment, obedience, or some kind of sacrifice. If that is true, then discipleship costs something.

It should be apparent that discipleship is distinct from one's salvation, that disciples are not born but made. If eternal life is free (by grace through faith), but discipleship is costly, then salvation must be distinct from discipleship. This chart should help show the distinctions between salvation and discipleship:

Conclusion To ask whether disciples are born or made is to ask whether justification is different from sanctification or whether Christian birth is different from Christian growth. To keep the gospel clear, we must not confuse the one condition of eternal salvation (faith in Jesus) with the many conditions of discipleship (commitment, obedience, following).

01.05. Interpreting Hebrews: Beginning with the Readers - Grace in Focus, July 2002

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Interpreting Hebrews: Beginning with the Readers - Grace in Focus, July 2002

Synopsis: This will help you get off on the right track in interpreting this sometimes difficult book. It shows that the readers were believers and that makes a difference in how the warnings are interpreted.

Many find Hebrews a difficult book to interpret. Perhaps the greatest difficulty is in interpreting the five warning passages (Hebrews 2:1-4; Hebrews 3:7-19, Hebrews 4:1-13, Hebrews 6:1-8, Hebrews 10:26-29, Hebrews 12:25-29). Many commentators treat these as warnings to those unbelievers among the readers. This views the target audience for the warnings as those who profess, but do not possess, the faith. But is this consistent with the evidence in the text? Most agree that the rest of the book clearly addresses believers. Is there any apparent disparity between the way those in the warnings are addressed and the rest of the epistle?

Evidence from Outside the Warnings

Common sense shows that the epistle was written to believers, as most agree. Little needs to be said here. Apart from the warnings, we find the readers addressed as "brethren" (Hebrews 10:19, Hebrews 13:22) and "holy brethren" (Hebrews 3:1). Things are said to them that can apply only to Christians (cf. Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 5:12, Hebrews 6:9, Hebrews 10:24-25). Note that all these appear shortly before or after the warning sections.

Also, the nature of the exhortations in Hebrews 13:1-25 shows they are obviously intended for believers. There is no attempt to apply them to two different groups. In fact, in the entire epistle, the warning passages are never introduced with any transition that indicates the author is shifting his attention to a different group within the readership. To imply otherwise is artificial and therefore disruptive to the flow of the text.

Evidence from Within the Warnings We now examine how the author speaks to those warned. His language makes it clear they are Christians.

They are addressed using first person plural pronouns, which shows the author identifies with them as believers ("we" in Hebrews 2:1, Hebrews 2:3, Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 3:19, Hebrews 4:3, Hebrews 10:26, Hebrews 10:30, Hebrews 10:39, Hebrews 12:28; and "us" in Hebrews 4:1-2, Hebrews 4:11, Hebrews 6:1, Hebrews 6:3, Hebrews 10:26, Hebrews 10:30, Hebrews 10:39, Hebrews 12:28).

They are also called "brethren" (Hebrews 3:12). Just as in the non-warning sections, this clearly shows their common position in God's family.

They have believed (Hebrews 4:3, Hebrews 10:39). This speaks of an unqualified faith in Christ as Savior. They are not said to have almost believed, or believed in an insufficient way.

They have Christian confidence (Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 10:35). This refers to their assurance of the benefits of Christ's provisions. They are therefore told to hold fast (Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 4:14, Hebrews 10:23) and endure (Hebrews 10:36) in that confidence.

They are in danger of denying their faith. They have not yet, but could "drift away" (Hebrews 2:1), depart "from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12), "fall away" (Hebrews 6:6), "draw back" (Hebrews 10:39), or "turn away" (Hebrews 12:25). All such language demands a point of departure from which they can fall. The only such point in the epistle is Jesus Christ and their confession of Him.

They are encouraged to enter God's rest (Hebrews 4:11) and go on to maturity (Hebrews 6:1). As in the Old Testament, "rest" refers not just to the reception of God's promise, but the enjoyment of it. It is only a privilege of believers, as is the possibility of growth into maturity.

They suffered for their faith after they were "illuminated" (Hebrews 10:32-34). They were able to endure this persecution because they knew they had a heavenly possession (Hebrews 10:34).

They are never told to believe in Christ, which we would expect if they are unbelievers. It would be a travesty for the author to omit this. Instead, he says the epistle was written to exhort or encourage the readers (Hebrews 13:22).

They are described as having experienced the blessings that come with faith in Christ. The most convincing evidence is from Hebrews 6:4-5 : They were "enlightened," had "tasted the heavenly gift," had "become partakers of the Holy Spirit," and had "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." Any attempt to apply these descriptions to unbelievers forces the text at the expense of good exegesis and the plain sense of the language. They had also "received the knowledge of the truth" (Hebrews 10:26), were "sanctified" (Hebrews 10:29), "know" God (Hebrews 10:30), were "illuminated" (Hebrews 10:32), and by implication are called "just" or righteous (Hebrews 10:38).

They are given Old Testament analogies that in the past and now in their present apply to God's chastening of His people. In Hebrews 3:16 Psalms 95:1-11 is used of the redeemed who came out of Egypt and so obviously applies to the redeemed readers. In Hebrews 10:30 Deuteronomy 32:36 speaks of God judging "His people." That this applies to believers is obvious in Hebrews 10:31 where there is the prospect of falling "into" the hands of God. They can not fall out of His hands.

They are exhorted to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28), something impossible for unbelievers.

They face the prospect of rewards conditioned on their faithful perseverance and obedience. They can be "partakers of Christ" (Hebrews 3:14), can enter God's rest (Hebrews 4:9, Hebrews 4:11), can have "an enduring possession . . . in heaven" (Hebrews 10:34), can receive a "great reward" (Hebrews 10:35), and can "receive a kingdom" (Hebrews 12:28).

Conclusion The evidence is overwhelming, both in the general nature of the epistle and in the warnings themselves, that the author is addressing Christians. There is no need to see those addressed by the warnings as unbelievers. They are not in need of salvation, but faithful

endurance. Evidently, these are Jewish believers who are tempted to mask their Christianity with Judaism, or revert altogether, because of the threat of persecution.

Probably the reason so many interpret these warnings as to unbelievers is because of the severe judgments threatened, especially those that mention fire. Should the mention of fire automatically imply the threat of eternal damnation? Absolutely not! But that is another study. Let us who believe take to heart both the exhortations to grow in our confession of Christ and the warnings about neglecting that growth. All of Hebrews can apply to us.

01.06. Why Lordship Faith Misses The Mark For Salvation ...

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Why Lordship Faith Misses The Mark For Salvation - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1999

Synopsis:

Lordship Salvation has a very confused view of the gospel that results in very confused Christians who hold to it. A detailed case is made against the Lordship view of the condition for eternal salvation.

Why Lordship Faith Misses The Mark For Salvation¹ The late comedian, George Burns, used to joke that a good friend invited him to join a country club. He said he wasn't interested. This friend said, "What do you mean you're not interested? This is an exclusive club." And Burns said, "I would never join a club that would have me as a member."

We in the Free Grace movement are accused of lowering the standards for getting into heaven. We are accused of "easy believism." We are charged with a view that is "no-lordship." John MacArthur refuses to even acknowledge us as the "Free Grace" movement. He calls us the "no-lordship movement."² Are we going to let these terms go unchallenged? You know sometimes if you are allowed to frame the question you win the debate, right? It's kind of like if I ask you "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?" How do you answer that? You lose either way. Pastors often face this type of dilemma. We answer the phone and someone asks, "Are you a full gospel church?" When I get this question I'm always tempted to say, "Well no, we're a half gospel church. Our budget is kind of tight this month." Or how about this one: "Are you a Spirit filled church?" "No, we're the carnal church in town. We're just kind of struggling along in the flesh right now."

We can't allow Lordship Salvation to frame the question and swing the debate. So what are their standards for salvation if we teach "easy believism?" Are their standards for salvation even attainable by people? Charles Price, in his book *Real Christians* recounts an occasion where a fellow went to an evangelistic meeting and heard and responded to the message. Afterwards he spoke to an evangelist who said that, "In light of all that we have talked about this evening, can you think of any reason why you should not become a Christian tonight?" The young man sat for a few moments thinking and he said, "No I cannot think of any reason." Then the evangelist said, "Then let me give you some." And for the next few minutes he began to explain the cost of being a Christian. He talked about the young man's need to surrender his whole life, his future, his ambitions, his relationships, his possessions, and everything that he was, to God. And only if he was prepared to do this, he explained, could Christ begin to work effectively in his life. And then the evangelist leaned even closer toward him and said, "Can you still not think of any reason why you shouldn't become a Christian tonight?" And the man said, "I can think of some now." So the evangelist said, "In that case, do not become a Christian until you have dealt with every one of those reasons and are willing to surrender everything to Christ."³

There's a lot at stake in this whole debate about faith and its meaning. What is endangered, of course, is the clear gospel, our confidence in sharing the message, our assurance of salvation, our Christian life, growth, joy, and happiness. But let's not forget the main thing at stake is not theology, but the souls of people who can be misled.

I. Lordship Faith Includes Works

How does Lordship Salvation understand faith?⁴ Kenneth Gentry, a leading proponent of Lordship Salvation, has a classic definition. He says, The Lordship view expressly states the necessity of acknowledging Christ as the Lord and Master of one's life in the act of receiving Him as Savior. These are not two different, sequential acts (or successive steps), but rather one act of pure trusting faith.⁵ So according to this definition, when we come to Christ as Savior, we also come to Him submitting to Him as Lord. It is not two acts; it is one act; and that is called faith. Lordship Salvation disagrees with the Free Grace understanding of faith as being convinced and persuaded that something is true.

According to Lordship Salvation, saving faith includes submission. Richard Belcher says, "True saving faith includes in it a submission to the Lordship of Christ."⁶ Another Lordship proponent says, "Saving faith is trust in Christ himself. It is a commitment of self in submission to all of Christ that is revealed."⁸ John MacArthur says, "Saving faith, then, is the whole of my being embracing all of Christ. Faith cannot be divorced from commitment;" and, "The call of the gospel is to trust Him (cf. John 5:39-40). That necessarily involves some degree of love, allegiance, and surrender to His authority."⁹ Bailey Smith asserts that "saving faith is not mere intellectual assent, but it involves an act of submission on our part."¹⁰

Quite a plethora of authors state essentially the same thing, that faith includes submission; submission that goes beyond our need for eternal life, to recognizing, acknowledging, and committing ourselves to Jesus Christ as Master of all of our lives. But the Lordship Salvation definition of faith not only involves submission, it involves obedience. "Disobedience," MacArthur says, "is unbelief. Real faith obeys."¹⁰ You'll notice how carefully he couched that. Disobedience is unbelief, but he doesn't say that faith is obedience. But he also says, "True faith is humble, submissive obedience;" and, "faith encompasses obedience?faith is not complete unless it is obedient."¹¹ Later on, after facing a lot of criticism, he softened his language somewhat in the second edition of *The Gospel According to Jesus*.¹²

Another says, "The opposite of saving faith is disobedience."¹³ Saucy concludes, "we have to acknowledge some aspect of obedience as inherent in saving faith as well."¹⁴ And then Mueller says, "Faith is synonymous with obedience."¹⁵ And so Lordship Salvation faith goes beyond trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior. Lordship faith includes obeying Him as Lord as a condition of eternal salvation. They have included obedience in their definition and understanding of faith. Therefore, Lordship faith requires works as a necessary condition of faith. MacArthur said, "The true test of faith is this, does it produce obedience? If not, it is not saving faith."¹⁶ And Mueller says, "The true faith that saves (justifies) is the faith that also produces appropriate works (sanctifies)."¹⁷

We know that the Roman Catholics teach that we are saved by faith plus works. Lordship Salvation teaches that we are saved by faith that works. But do not both definitions include works

as a condition necessary for faith to be valid, for faith to be effectual? Either way, works are a necessary condition of eternal salvation. But I have a problem with that. It confuses justification with sanctification. Justification as the forensic legal declaration that we are righteous in our position before God, is confused with sanctification, the outworking of that righteousness in everyday practical living. Now we know that justification and sanctification are related. But we also must keep them distinct lest we confuse the Gospel itself and undo the Reformation. If we make works a necessary condition of salvation, we contradict the words of Romans 4:4-5, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." The apostle Paul is teaching us that faith does not mix with works in any way. Just as you cannot mix oil with water, faith is opposed to works for salvation.

Didn't Jesus teach this also in John 6:1-71? When the Jews came to Him and followed Him across the lake after having been fed the fish and the bread, and Jesus saw how earnestly they were seeking Him and they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28). Here the Jews were exposing their pharasaical theology and the baggage that they had from the Pharisees made up of the minutia of laws, and the extrapolations of laws, and thousands upon thousands of man-made interpretations. And Jesus gives an interesting reply, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). Now notice that Jesus uses the same word they started with, work, but He puts it in the singular. He says this is the work of God. "You want to talk about works. That's how you're conditioned." Jesus says this is the work, with a play on words. What is that work? That work is to believe. But of course, believing isn't a work at all, is it? In other words, this is what God requires of you, not works, but one thing, that is to believe.

Then He goes on in John 6:1-71 to explain what it means to believe. He uses the analogy of eating and drinking. It's interesting that He would choose that kind of word picture to illustrate what faith is: a passive appropriation of something. Not doing, not working, not an active work, but a passive appropriation. That's the essence of faith. How can anyone call eating or drinking hard work? If eating and drinking is hard work, some of us need to take a break! To make works a necessary condition of faith confuses grace with merit. The Scriptures are clear that we cannot confuse grace with merit lest we boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). It confuses Christ's work with what we are required to do. We are required to believe in order to be saved. Who did the obedience for our salvation? It was Jesus Himself that obeyed. Romans 5:19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (italics added). It's not our obedience that saves us, it's Christ's obedience that saves us. We are the recipients of the blessing of the work that He has done for us. The only command for an unbeliever to obey is the command to believe the gospel.

II. Lordship Faith Grounds Assurance in Our Works So I have a problem with works as a necessary condition of faith. But Lordship proponents also require of faith that works must be quantified. For example, MacArthur says, "The fruit of one's life reveals whether that person is a believer or an unbeliever. There is no middle ground."¹⁸ Also in his book he says that fruit has to be abundant and obvious. You can't go scrounging around looking for it.¹⁹

I have a problem with that too. When we look for fruit as proof of one's salvation, that immediately turns us into fruit inspectors who must inspect each person's fruit with arbitrary standards. I don't feel comfortable in that role, do you?

I have a question for those who want to inspect fruit to prove salvation: Who has the list of appropriate works that qualify somebody as a Christian? If they were to show me a list, I would like to ask them a second question: Who wrote the list? Where did you get this? I see no list of fruits or works listed in the Scriptures that prove one is a Christian. I think it's a rather presumptuous attitude for any believer to think that they can judge by a person's outward works whether or not that person is saved.

You see, it's a slippery thing; it's a relative thing, fruit is. What may be fruit in one person's life may be different to another. We have different starting points when we become believers. Some of us start way down on the scale. Fruit for us might be just breathing out a short prayer before we go to bed at night. On the other hand, fruit for someone who has been in church all of his life might be a more intense prayer life. How can anybody measure what God is doing in the inner workings of our heart and soul, and how He is prompting us in and through His Word? How can anyone know what someone is doing in secret as far as prayer and Bible study or good works is concerned? I think it's quite a presumptuous attitude to think that we can look at somebody and judge them by their fruits. I don't think that's comparing apples with apples, if we can extend the analogy a little bit. When we look to fruits as proof of faith, it necessarily breeds insecurity and doubt. Am I doing enough? Do I have enough fruit? Is my fruit ripe enough? There are problems with quantifying our faith.

III. Lordship Faith Must Be Qualified Their definition of faith also requires that faith must be qualified. Not only quantified, but qualified. And so you will read Lordship Salvation teachers using a lot of terms to qualify faith, sometimes to disqualify faith with negative terms like "spurious faith," "counterfeit faith," "intellectual faith," "false faith," "insincere faith," "pseudo faith," "emotional faith," and "head faith." Yet none of these expressions is found in the Bible. On the other hand they will want to qualify faith, in a positive way, with words like "true faith," "authentic faith," "saving faith," "personal faith," "real faith," "efficacious faith," and "heart faith." None of those expressions are found in the Bible either.

Now there is a convenience to using terms like saving faith to know what we're talking about. And sometimes the debate forces us to talk about free grace, which is a redundancy; saving faith, which is a redundancy; and things like that. But they want to say that there are different kinds of faith, and I have a problem with that. When we talk about different kinds of faith, we are distracted from the object of our faith to having faith in our faith. That's an unhealthy introspection. Am I having enough faith? Am I having the right kind of faith? Is my faith deep enough, strong enough? When we look to our faith instead of to the object of our faith, we are necessarily distracted from that which actually saves us. Even Benjamin Warfield, the Presbyterian, who probably would not have put himself in our camp, said that "the saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith, or the attitude of faith, or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith."²⁰

It's like our eyesight. Eyesight is nothing apart from the object of our sight. We may as well close our eyes and look inside to see whether we have sight, as to look inside to see whether we have faith. Faith means nothing without an object, as sight means nothing without an object. So

Lordship Salvation talks about different kinds of faith, forcing unfortunate folks to examine what kind of faith they have. The truth is technically, we're not saved by faith anyway. We're saved through faith. Faith is the instrumental means; grace is the efficient means, of our salvation. We're saved by Jesus Christ. We're saved by His grace. We're saved through faith. You would know what I meant if I said to you "I put the fire out with the hose." Now hoses don't put out fires. But hoses are the channels for water that puts the fire out. The hose is the instrumental means; the water is the efficient means. Faith is the instrumental means by which we are able to access our salvation through Jesus Christ, His grace, His death, His resurrection. So there's an unhealthy emphasis on faith that causes an unhealthy introspection. When we emphasize the quality of one's faith, we automatically de-emphasize the object of one's faith. I heard the story of a man who went to an evangelistic meeting. He responded to the message, and afterwards spoke to a counselor. The counselor told him that to be saved he must believe in Jesus. The man went to the meeting the next night, heard another message, responded to the message again, and talked to a different counselor. This counselor told him that to be saved he must believe in Jesus. Later the man was giving his testimony on how he had been saved while talking to that second counselor. And the first counselor came up to him afterwards and said, "I'm a bit confused. Can you tell me, what did the second counselor tell you that I didn't tell you?" And the man said, "Well, you told me to believe in Jesus." He told me to "believe in Jesus." There's a difference, a big difference. It is the object of our faith that saves us.

Genuine faith in a worthless object is useless. You can sincerely believe in an error. I have a friend who was given a penicillin shot with the sincere belief by the doctor that it would make her well. It almost killed her. The object of faith was untrustworthy in that case. We are not to look at the kind of faith we have. We are to make sure we are looking to the right object. Faith in the right object will save us.

If we grant to Lordship Salvation that faith must be qualified, that there are different kinds of faith, we surrender objectivity to subjectivity. And assurance becomes impossible. To have faith in one's faith is to detract from faith in a Savior. There is only one kind of faith. There are many objects to faith, but what saves us is Jesus Christ as the object of our faith.

IV. Lordship Faith Is Inaccessible to Most

Now the Lordship Salvation definition of faith also requires that faith must be a gift of God. For example, MacArthur says that faith is a "saving energy" that it is "divinely produced."²¹ He believes it is different from other kinds of faith. He calls it "a supernatural ability to apprehend spiritual reality invisible to the eye of flesh."²² If it's a supernatural ability, if it's divinely produced, if it's a saving energy, it must be God's gift. And you see how all this fits together. If faith includes obedience, then it must be a gift of God. He gives it to us, so we automatically obey. It's all kind of a package deal. MacArthur says, "the faith God begets includes both the volition and the ability to comply with His will (Php 2:13). In other words, faith encompasses obedience."²³

Now I know that there are people who are Free Grace who believe that faith is a gift of God. I have a little problem with that interpretation, though, when I understand what faith is. I think it confuses grace with faith, again, the efficient means of salvation with the instrumental means of salvation. And in Ephesians 2:8-9 where it talks about "by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God," it refers to salvation by grace through faith, that process, that

opportunity, what God has done in allowing us that salvation. I don't think Paul is talking about just faith.

If faith is a gift of God, it nullifies our human responsibility. Think about that. God requires us to believe in order to go to heaven. If we do not believe, we will be condemned. John 3:18 says, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." God condemns those who do not believe. But we can't believe unless we have God's gift of faith. God condemns those to whom He does not give the gift of faith? That is unjust and unfair. You see, it just doesn't make sense to me. And we know that God enlightens us to the truth, that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment. God draws us to Himself by illumining us to His Word, His truth. But ultimately it is faith that responds to God's revelation of Himself. So I don't believe that faith is a gift of God, or anything supernatural. There's only one kind of faith. To believe something is to be persuaded that it is true. What differs is not faith itself, but the object of faith.

V. Conclusion As a pastor and as one with the heart of an evangelist, I am distressed that what Lordship Salvation has done is taken salvation, which God intended to be accessible, and made it inaccessible. After all is said and done, what we know is that God loves people and wants to see them saved. And because He wants to see them saved, He wants to make it simple. He did the hard work, so that we could bring a simple message to people, so that they could be saved.

Salvation is not meant to be an exclusive club. It is meant to be broad in its appeal and accessible to everyone. You know I've recently changed my perspective on John 14:6, where Jesus says "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." I used to be apologetic about that verse. People would say "That's such an exclusive verse, such a narrow religion, such a narrow view of heaven." I started thinking about that and I decided that it is an inclusive verse. You see, anybody can come to Jesus. Not everybody can keep the seven pillars. Not everybody can do the five steps. Not everybody can keep the law, or all the other systems that the religions of the world offer, but anybody can come to Jesus. I will never ever again "apologize" for John 14:6. It makes the way of salvation accessible to anyone.

If you want somebody to be rescued, delivered, or saved, you make it simple for them. You make it as simple as possible so that as many as possible can be saved. That's why we don't make flotation devices out of Teflon. That's why in emergencies people simply dial 911, not 911-10-10-321, or whatever. God wants people to be saved. And He designed His gospel that way, so that even a child can believe. A man on his deathbed can believe. A thief on a cross can believe. What did the thief on the cross promise Jesus when he said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"? And Jesus replied, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." Could the thief walk an aisle? No, his feet were fastened to a cross. Could he raise his hand? No, his hands were tied or nailed to the cross. Could he be baptized? No, the cross would have floated. Did he promise Jesus anything? No. Did Jesus demand anything of him? No. Salvation by grace through faith means there is hope for a dying man, for someone who can do nothing for himself.

I had a person in my congregation whose father was dying of cancer. I asked him if he had talked to his father about how to have eternal life. He said that he had talked with him, but he said that at the end of his life it wouldn't be fair for God to forgive him of all he had done now that he was dying. I told him to show his father the story of the thief on the cross. Since when is grace ever

fair? Grace is not fair, it gives us what we don't deserve. By definition, grace is not fair.

Let me tell you about another thief I met. On my first visit to Ghana, West Africa, to teach the Bible at a Bible College, I was working on a car in our compound one day when I heard a commotion that was working itself down a dirt road. I immediately recognized what it was because I had seen it before—they had caught a thief. Now in Ghana when you catch a thief you take justice into your own hands because you have very little provisions and the police are corrupt. And so what they usually do to a thief is beat him severely and let him go. I went out to the gate of the compound and looked there at fifty or sixty young people with smiles on their faces like they were having a big old time. They carried sticks, clubs, machetes, axes, and rubber hoses. And there in the middle was a rather tall fellow, blood streaming down his face, a large gash in his head, and a tire around his neck. And when I came to the gate of the compound, they all stopped and looked at me because we were the only obruni, or white folks in the area. They were wondering what I would do, if I would stop the proceeding. But you know, when you're in another culture you really don't know what to do sometimes. You don't want to interfere with their system of justice. And so I just turned and went back to my work figuring that they would give him a severe beating and that he would learn his lesson. When I went back to work a missionary who was living on the compound that we shared came over to us. Now this missionary was from a different denomination that really believes a different gospel. We just happened to make his acquaintance for the summer. And he said "Hey did you see the thief?" And I said that I had seen him. He told me they were going to burn him. When I asked what he meant, he told me that the tire around his neck was filled with kerosene and they were going to light it and burn him. That friends, is called a "Nigerian necklace" over there. That's when I knew we had to do something. We walked to the other side of the compound where they had looped around. When we went out that gate, there he was collapsed in the mud. He still had the tire around his neck and was thoroughly drenched in kerosene. There was a young teenager standing above him with a can that had contained the kerosene, and another teenager was standing above him getting ready to strike a match. We worked our way through the group and asked if we could talk to the man. We told them we were sofou, which means preacher. My missionary friend began to ask the crowd if there were any accusers or witnesses. There were none. And as he did, I knelt down to talk to this fellow. I said "What is your name." He said "Benjamin." I said "Benjamin, can you understand English?" He said "yes." I said "Benjamin, I may not be able to help you and save you, but I can tell you how to have eternal life. Do you understand?" He said "yes." In the precious few seconds I had with him I explained to him the Gospel of grace and the way of salvation. To make a long story short, we were able to get him up amidst the protests of the crowd and get him off to a hospital from which he later fled, because if you saw the hospitals there you would flee too. I don't know if I'm going to see Benjamin in heaven, but the point of my story is that I had a message for a dying thief in the mud that no other religion in this world could have brought him. Do you understand that? Do you understand that the gospel of grace through simple faith is a message for a young child, for a dying thief on a cross, a dying thief in the mud, a pagan Philippian jailer? It's the only message of hope. It's the only message of certainty, the only message of security that brings assurance. I don't apologize for the gospel of faith. God has made salvation available to anybody, anywhere, anytime. Selah.

Dr. Charlie Bing, GraceLife Ministries

1 This article is from a message originally delivered March 30, 1999 at the Grace Evangelical Society's pastor's conference. It has been edited slightly for publication.

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3 Charles Price, Real Christians (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1987), 55-56.

4 For further information see Charles C. Bing, Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), GraceLife edition (Burleson, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 1997).

5 Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," Baptist Reformation Review 5 (Spring 1976): 52.

6 Richard P. Belcher, A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990), 2.

7 Robert Lescelius, Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers (Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 24.

8 MacArthur, Faith Works, 45, 50.

9 Bailey E. Smith, The Grace Escape: Jesus as Savior and Lord (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 77.

10 John F. MacArthur, Jr., The Gospel According to Jesus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 47.

11 Ibid., 140, 173.

12 For example, "True faith is humble, submissive obedience" in the first edition (p. 140) became "True faith produces a heart that is humble, submissive, and obedient" in the revised and expanded edition (p. 148). MacArthur, The Gospel According to Jesus, revised and expanded edition.

13 Lescelius, Lordship Salvation, 24.

14 Robert L. Saucy, "Second Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James'" by John F. MacArthur, Jr., Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 33 (March 1990): 47.

15 Marc Mueller, "Lordship Salvation Syllabus" (Panorama City, CA: Grace Community Church, 1981, 1985), 20.

16 MacArthur, The Gospel According to Jesus, 47.

17 Mueller, 22.

18 MacArthur, The Gospel According to Jesus, 178.

19 Ibid., 127.

20 Benjamin B. Warfield, "Faith," in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 404-44, ed. Samuel Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1952), 425.

21 MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 28, 172-73.

22 John F. MacArthur, Jr., "Faith According to the Apostle James," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 23.

23 MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 173.

01.07. Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Discipleship....

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Discipleship - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Autumn 1999

Synopsis:

Lordship Salvation's unclear gospel leads to an unclear view of discipleship and the Christian life. Here is a detailed look at that view and the correct view of discipleship.

Why Lordship Misses the Mark for Discipleship 1

What is your definition of a disciple? We know that good theology often boils down to good definitions, and in good theology we shouldn't take definitions for granted. Let me offer you some definitions that you've probably taken for granted - not theological definitions, but just some every-day type of words. Like the word adult. Do you know what an adult is? An adult is someone who stopped growing at both ends and now is growing in the middle. What is a cannibal? A cannibal is someone who is fed up with people. You've heard this definition of a committee: a group that keeps minutes and wastes hours. You know what dust is? Dust is mud with all the juice squeezed out of it. What's a mosquito? An insect that makes you like flies. And my favorite definition, a skeleton: a bunch of bones with the person scraped off!

Don't take definitions for granted. Definitions are important. Especially when we talk about discipleship. What is a disciple? You better know what one is, because in some of Jesus' last words, He told us to go and make them. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations," He told us (Matthew 28:19). But what, exactly, are you trying to make? What, exactly, are you trying to produce? What does a disciple look like?

We must begin with the end in mind. So what is your definition of a disciple? There is a lot of talk about discipleship in the church today. Everybody talks about making disciples. We just can't seem to agree on what a disciple is, and so now enter the Lordship Salvation proponents, who have a different definition of discipleship. A misunderstanding of what a disciple is confuses the gospel. It dangerously will leave people in spiritual immaturity instead of moving them on into maturity where God desires. I think we all recognize that churches are full of too many people who are in spiritual infancy and have not moved on and grown to live productive and fruitful reproducing types of lives.

I. How Lordship Salvation Understands Discipleship¹ So what do we do about this problem? Well, the Lordship Salvation camp says that we should front-load the gospel and raise the ante. Let's raise the standard so that we make sure that only those who are committed to going on can really become Christians to begin with, they would say. Is that the answer? Doesn't this breed legalism and insecurity which never ever produces spiritual maturity and Christlikeness? We may alter the external, but not the internal; we may change the behavior, but not the heart, with a system like that. Let's take a look at how Lordship Salvation understands discipleship.

John MacArthur says, "The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience." 2 He equates the gospel call with the discipleship call. Another writer says, "We maintain that being a believer and a disciple are the same. A believer/disciple has salvation. One who has salvation is a disciple." 3 He couldn't be much clearer about what he believes. Smith says, "Those who believe in Christ follow Him, and those who do not follow Him do not really believe in Him" (emphasis his), and "Discipleship is an invitation to salvation, not to some deeper experience of secondary commitment." 4 And another person says, "The call to faith and discipleship are the same and cannot be separated." 5 And then, the last one, by J. I. Packer in his classic book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*: "In our presentation of Christ's gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and making sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness. In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything." 6 Is that going to effect how we do evangelism? Absolutely. How widely read is J. I. Packer's book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*? You'll find it still in print, I am sure. You see, there's a different definition that Lordship Salvation offers for discipleship.

II. How the Bible Presents Discipleship But how does the Bible present discipleship? What's the Biblical definition of a disciple? The word itself comes from the verb "to learn," and so it simply means in its simplest form "learner," "pupil," "adherent to a system." But you and I recognize that there are different degrees of commitment involved in learning something. You know that because you went through college perhaps, or some other kind of school. Some of you may have just taken a course and audited it - a minimum commitment - but you were there, you were a student, you were learning. Others of you might have gone for the whole enchilada, tried to get on the dean's list, graduated with honors - the ultimate commitment. There are learners at different levels of commitment.

We see this in John chapter 6. At the beginning of the chapter there is a multitude of people who are following Jesus out of curiosity basically, or perhaps even political motivations. And yet by the end of the chapter, there are only twelve who remain, twelve who are committed. In John chapter 6, believe it or not, John refers to those who turned away from Jesus as disciples, and says that Jesus knew that they didn't believe (vv 60-66). So in the broadest sense, you see, a disciple is someone who is a follower, somebody who is learning from a system, and it may even be someone who doesn't believe. Judas was one of the twelve disciples. Peter was one of the twelve disciples, but there is quite a difference between the two.

What I am saying is that I am cautioning you to be careful about how you define the term disciple, and not lock it in to a rigid definition. It is a fairly flexible term, as long as you have the idea of learning, pupil, or adherent. Theologically it can be a flexible term always determined more carefully by its context. In the New Testament we read about the disciples of Moses, the disciples of the Pharisees, the disciples of John the Baptist, and then, of course, there are the disciples of Jesus, which is the predominate use in the New Testament and the one that we are most familiar and comfortable with. So in its essence, a disciple is a follower, a student, a pupil, an adherent.

What also helps us to understand what a disciple is in the New Testament is the invitation that we see Jesus offering to people. He invites them to follow Him. He invites them with a synonymous term to come after Him. Now both these terms mean more than just a physical walking behind.

Both these terms really denote, to the first century mind, the system of education and discipleship they had then, which was based on a Rabbi calling together a group of disciples who would share his life, who would travel with him, who would live with him, who would eat with him, who would stay with him, and basically share their lives and live with him. They didn't sign up for Discipleship 101 not knowing who their professor was. They would either seek out the man they wanted to be like, or that Rabbi would seek them out and invite them into discipleship. When Jesus said, "Follow Me," when He said, "Come after Me," I am convinced He was offering to those people a specific invitation, a pointed and direct invitation to take up a life of discipleship and to follow Him and to share His life. The goal of discipleship also helps us understand what a disciple is. The best statement of the goal of a disciple is in Matthew 10:25. Here we read, "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master." You see, the whole goal of a disciple is to be like his teacher. This tells us that being a disciple is a progression; it is a process. And if our teacher is Jesus Christ, it is interminable in this life. It's never over until we are glorified and made like Him. So discipleship by its very definition is a process.

I am fond of saying that there is a sense in which every disciple is challenged to become more of a disciple. No matter where you are in your Christian life today, God wants you somewhere else tomorrow. That's discipleship. And what He is asking you to do today is different from what He is going to ask me to do today. It's a process that spans our lifetime, and nobody retires from it. The journey goes on.

III. The Differences Between Salvation and Discipleship

Now you will notice some of the differences between salvation and discipleship I have listed here and tried by indentation to show how they might be grouped. This basically, is going to form some of my comments about the problems I have with the Lordship view of discipleship.

We should notice the obvious differences and that we cannot merge the two. For example, eternal salvation speaks of justification. Discipleship speaks of sanctification. Our eternal salvation then, is positional righteousness, whereas discipleship is practical righteousness. We know that salvation is by grace through faith, and it's free. But discipleship is by works through faithfulness, and it's costly. Our eternal salvation depends on Christ's love for me, Christ's commitment to me, and Christ's taking His cross for me. Discipleship involves my love for Christ, my commitment to Christ, and my taking up my cross daily for Him. The focus of eternal salvation is eternal life. Discipleship, however, focuses on eternal rewards. Eternal salvation involves an unbeliever's response. Discipleship involves a believer's response. Eternal salvation is instantaneous, and a new birth. Discipleship is progressive and a continued growth. Eternal salvation depends on one condition: belief. Discipleship depends on many conditions, which I'll mention later. Eternal salvation is inclusive of all. Discipleship is exclusive. So let's break some of these down and talk about them by category.

A. Lordship Faith Confuses Justification and Sanctification

First of all, Lordship Salvation misses the mark for discipleship because it confuses justification and sanctification. We've said a lot about this already. ⁷ We won't spend a lot of time here. Just as they confuse faith in their definition of faith, justification, and sanctification, so they do the same with discipleship. Justification is the declaration by God of our positional righteousness before

Him, while sanctification is our progressive growth in righteousness and godly conduct, learning to live in obedience, learning to live up to our new position. But we cannot confuse the two. They are related, but they must remain distinct. How clearly that comes out in the Book of Romans where justification is clearly dealt with from Romans 3:21-34, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-21. And when we come to Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39, we find a discussion of our sanctification. Isn't it interesting that in the Romans the first command doesn't come until Romans 6:11? Why is that? Because obedience has nothing to do with justification, everything to do with sanctification. And so the commands don't begin until Romans 6:11 B. Lordship Faith Negates Grace with Works

Another problem with Lordship Salvation is that it negates grace with works. What does Romans 11:6 say? "If it is of works, it is no longer grace." Pretty simple. You can't mix the two. It's either by works or by grace. Lordship Salvation confuses the two. Free grace believes that it is through faith in Christ that we are eternally saved, but it is through faithfulness to Christ that we are made disciples.

Lordship Salvation talks about costly grace, but free grace says that there is only one kind of grace, and it is free. Discipleship is costly, but grace is free. John MacArthur says, "Salvation is both free and costly."⁸ How so? How can something be free and costly? Well, he says that it is a paradox, a seeming contradiction. No, it's just bad theology, bad English, and bad logic. A cannot equal B. Is salvation costly? To God, yes. To Jesus, yes. But we have a word for that, and the word is redemption, which in its essence means to purchase or to buy. It implies cost. Let's be more careful when we talk about salvation in its various terms and various perspectives. When we talk about eternal salvation and its cost, we talk about redemption, but the cost is not ours, it's God's, it's Jesus'. He paid the price. But what does Romans 3:24 say about our redemption and the freeness of salvation? It couldn't be clearer. Romans 3:24 says, "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Free to us, costly to God. And the only reason we can have a free salvation is because God paid a tremendous price. So we don't say that there is no price. We don't deny that there is a cost to salvation. We just say that God paid it by His grace.

That's the wonderfulness of our salvation. Salvation is free to us, but it cost Him something. To talk about "costly grace" is a contradiction in terms. We call that an oxymoron, like "military intelligence," "Russian economy," "Social Security," or "Honorable Senator." Those are oxymorons, contradictions. There's no such thing as "costly grace." Grace, by its very definition, is free. There is only one kind of grace. It's absolutely free. We talk about "free grace," and that's a redundancy, but we have to do it because the debate has forced us to do it. We talk about the "Free Grace" movement. That's kind of like talking about the "inerrant word of God." Why do we have to say that? Or the "infallible, inerrant word of God," or the "infallible, inspired, inerrant word of God." All those are redundancies, but the debate that's going on demands it of us. It's a shame.

We believe that Christ's love for us is what brings us our salvation. It is our love for Christ that is part of the discipleship process. In the same way, it was Christ's commitment to me that took Him to the cross, and my commitment to Him that helps me to grow as a disciple. His commitment to me, that took Him to the cross, and He took up His cross and carried it down the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha for me, and I am to take up my cross daily for Him in discipleship. And

then, we have eternal life versus eternal rewards. It's amazing to me how many times Jesus Christ and Paul the apostle used rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ as a motivation for Christian living, as something to look forward to and to shape our lives by. It was so good to hear [Dr. Earl Radmacher's] exhortation about keeping our eyes on the eternal significance of life in the Kingdom of God, because Jesus and Paul certainly did, and yet we hear so little teaching about that. And that is, for one reason, because Lordship Salvation has confused the two. They don't like to talk about rewards, and so many rewards passages are interpreted as salvation passages. Discipleship truth is interpreted as salvation truth. We lose the beauty of the promise of rewards and eternal significance and kingdom life, and a whole section of Scripture is eviscerated.

C. Lordship Faith is Unrealistic in Its Expectation of the Unregenerate Lordship Salvation confuses discipleship, which also results in an unrealistic expectation from the unregenerate. You see, the Lordship Salvation view of discipleship assumes a Christian response from unbelievers. But what would an unbeliever understand about carrying his cross? What would an unbeliever understand about loving God with all his heart? He doesn't know God. Would we expect an unbeliever to give up all his possessions or be willing to? What kind of logic is it that demands of an unbeliever such sophisticated, mature Christian decisions that I am still grappling with in my own life? It just doesn't make sense to expect from someone who is dead in his sin, to expect from someone whose mind has been veiled by Satan himself, to respond to God with a fully loving heart at the moment of salvation, to respond to God in total commitment and total submission, to be willing to suffer for Him.

We believe that obedience and commitment are a response to God's wonderful grace, and that's why Romans 12:1 is Romans 12:1 and not Romans 1:1. Paul had to wait until Romans 12:1 so that he could say, "by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice." That's why he waits until Ephesians 4:1 to exhort us to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called." He had to tell us about who we are before he tells us what to do. And yet we are so guilty of getting the cart before the horse and telling people what to do before we tell them what they are and why they should do it. Even we, who believe in free grace, will fall into that error. Listen to the words of Colossians 2:6 as well: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in Him." There is a process; there is a progression. We receive Christ; we trust in Him as Savior. He comes inside of us. We now learn to walk with Him in fellowship. This progression probably comes out best in Titus. You might want to look at Titus 2:1-15. I don't think it can be said any clearer of how salvation should result in discipleship, that they are sequential. Titus 2:11 says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." The grace of God has appeared. Jesus has brought us salvation. That salvation teaches us as a consequence how to live a godly life. The word used for teaching there is a word that was used of training children. How appropriate, since the Christian life is a process of taking those who are not mature into maturity, from spiritual infancy into spiritual adulthood. So it is unrealistic to expect the unregenerate to make mature Christian decisions. It takes the grace of God to teach us how to make those decisions and commitments. Did it ever occur to the Lordship Salvation person, for example, that someone who is drowning may just want to get out of the water, and not become a life-guard? Or become a missionary? When someone realizes that they are lost in their sins and they are destined to separation from God, what is their concern? A legitimate concern is to be

saved from sin or separation. Some may be saved with a heart of gratitude, some may be saved with a loving heart. I don't deny that these things can happen in an overlapping manner so that we can't easily separate the two. Some people realize that when Jesus saves them they owe Him everything, and they should commit to Him, and they do so from day one. That happens. But probably, more likely, there are people like me, who coasted along for a good while before we really understood what the Christian life should be about and what God has done for us. And no matter how they start, God is going to continue to ask of them decisions and commitments along the way.

D. Lordship Faith Leaves You No Where to Grow

Lordship Salvation misses the mark in discipleship, because their understanding leaves you nowhere to grow. You see, if disciples are born not made, then there is nowhere to grow. We understand the conditions of discipleship, which are: love God with all your heart, love Him more than your mother, brothers, sisters, father, etc, deny yourself, take up your cross daily, follow Christ, be willing to commit all of your possessions, be willing to suffer for Jesus Christ, abide in His word. All these are conditions for discipleship that we find in the gospels.⁹ Now if we believe that people must make those commitments in order to become a Christian, where does that leave them room to grow? But growth is expected. Peter said, "As new-born babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). He said, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Part of that growth is dealing with the reality of sin in our lives. How does Lordship discipleship leave room for the reality of sin in our lives? In 1 Corinthians 3:1-23, no matter what you do with the carnal Christian there, he's still a carnal Christian. He's still undeniably a babe in Christ. There is growth that needs to take place. And when you get to 1 Corinthians 11:30, you see Christians that are living in carnality and abusing the Lord's supper, and they die in their carnality. They are believers who have not submitted.

Lordship Salvation is not realistic in its expectations for Christian growth, nor is it realistic about the reality of sin in our lives. I think that the Bible is very clear that there is always another level of commitment that we are called to. That's just the excitement of the Christian life. Life is an adventure with Jesus. I don't know about you, but I'm quite an outdoors person and when I get to walking in mountains or the hills, I'm like a billy-goat. I've got to start climbing. I love a good view, and so I'll climb. I was in Southern California this summer and I climbed up this one hill. But it's awfully deceiving when you're in the mountains sometimes, because you think if you just get up to that top you'll have a beautiful view. And then you get up there and you find, "Well, I'm not really at the top, am I? There's another ridge I didn't see, and I'll bet the view is even better up there." So you go up to the next ridge and you say, "Boy, the view is beautiful up here." But you know what? There's still another ridge there, and so pretty soon you're getting way up there. That's what discipleship is like. God takes us to one level and life is exciting, but you know something? There's another level to get to. There are greater challenges, greater rewards, greater excitement in store for us.

That's how Jesus called His own disciples. When we study the process of discipleship and His calls and appeals to them in the gospels, we find that He called the disciples to be disciples, kind of like calling saved people to be saved. For example, in John 1:1-51, we find Peter coming to Jesus Christ, and yet we see Jesus inviting the earliest disciples, including Andrew, to follow Him.

So we are introduced to Peter and assume that Peter probably believed then, and yet we know that later in life, as told by Mark 1:1-45 or Matthew 4:1-25, that Jesus sees them by the sea mending their nets or fishing and He says, "Come follow Me." Well, didn't He already say that to Peter in John 1:1-51? Yes He did, but He needs to say it again. These men knew more about Him, so the commitment level needed to change.

What do you do with Luke 5:1-39 when Jesus sees them again by the sea, and He says, "Follow Me"? Most people assume that this is a parallel account of Matthew 4:1-25. I don't. I explain the details in my dissertation. ¹⁰ But I think it is significant to note that the setting is different, the circumstances are different, they are doing different things, and yet Jesus says to Peter again, "Follow Me." In fact, Jesus says to Peter a number of times, "Follow Me," "Follow Me," "Follow Me" throughout the gospels, and then you get to John 21:1-25 and He tells Peter twice, "Follow Me." Peter is surely a believer by now, isn't he? Why in John 21:1-25 does Jesus have to tell Peter to follow Him? Because He's given him new revelation and He's challenging him to a greater commitment based on that new content. He told Peter, "When you are older, you are going to be stretched out and you are going to be led where you don't want to go," referring to his manner of death. And then He said, "Now, you follow Me - Now that I've told you that you are going to die for Me, you follow Me." Well, you see, "Follow Me" takes on a whole new significance to somebody who has just learned that he's going to die. And then Peter sees John over there and asks Jesus, "What about him? What about this guy?" And Jesus says, "It's none of your business. You follow Me." Well, there's another new revelation for Peter: God has an individually designed ministry for him, an individual calling for him. "Don't worry about your brother, get on with what I've told you to do." And He says again to Peter, "Follow Me." Do you want a model for discipleship? Look at Peter. That's why Peter is so prominent in the Scriptures. He's always the first apostle named, the spokesman for the group, an extrovert. An extrovert is someone who talks while he's thinking of something to say. That's Peter. But thank God that we are given the model of Peter to look at, because Peter wasn't a perfect person, and it shows us that part of discipleship is learning how to fail. Discipleship is a journey, but that journey has setbacks and obstacles and we sometimes trip and fall, as Peter did. Yet during that whole account of Peter denying Jesus Christ, if you look at that account in John, you'll see that word "follow" appears every now and then. "Are you a follower of that man?" "No, I'm not." Oh, yes, he was. He followed Christ secretly at a distance. It's an amazing study. I've got seven sermons on Peter as a follower, but I'm not going to preach them all right now. So Jesus appeals to Peter's curiosity in John 1:1-51; He appeals to his devotion to duty in John 21:1-25. Jesus never lets up the pressure of discipleship. It is a progression. It is a process. It is a journey. It is a call to commitment. There is a sense in which a disciple is always challenged to become more of a disciple. So how can we say that all those discipleship commitments are involved in coming to Christ as Savior? What do you do with the secret disciples in John, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus? They were secret disciples, but it took time for them to come out. I hate to use that term with them, but it took them time to show their Christian faces. The process of discipleship goes on. It is never finished until glorification.

E. Lordship Faith Confuses the Gospel

Lordship Salvation misses the mark in discipleship, because it confuses the gospel. If discipleship and eternal salvation are equated, then according to their definition, there are many conditions for salvation. You must deny yourself, according to Luke 9:23, as well as take up your cross and

follow Christ. Jesus said in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life, he cannot be My disciple;" in Luke 14:33, "So, likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple;" in John 8:31, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed;" and in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

There are a lot of conditions for discipleship, but one condition for eternal salvation: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So if we take Lordship's definition for discipleship, doesn't that confuse the gospel? Of course, it does. How could a person ever know that he or she is saved, ever know that he or she has met all those conditions? Assurance would become illusive - No, it would become impossible, absolutely impossible. How many of you have met those conditions satisfactorily to yourself or to God? If disciples are born and not made, then boy, they sure have to hit the ground running. They say only 2% of Christians in America are actively leading people to Christ. But Lordship Salvation people say that part of discipleship is fishing for men, and if you're not fishing, you are not following. Well, there are a lot of Christians in that category aren't there? I think they have just excluded themselves from the Kingdom of God.

F. Lordship Faith Makes Salvation Inaccessible

Lordship Salvation misses the mark also because it makes salvation inaccessible. Here we end up with the same concern that we have about Lordship's understanding of faith: that they are taking away the hope of salvation from so many people. The gospel invitation is inclusive; it is "whoever," "whosoever." But discipleship is exclusive. Jesus said, "You can't be My disciple unless..." or "Unless a man..." When it came to salvation, Jesus invited everyone. His arms were open wide. When it came to discipleship, He practically pushed people away.

I know a fellow who started a pretty intensive discipleship ministry to teenagers. He invited all the teenagers in several churches to come, and he promoted it heavily. Only a few teenagers came. He was greatly discouraged, wanting to quit. And I told him, "Wait a minute. Let's look at what you are trying to do. It's the nature of discipleship. You will never have people flock to discipleship classes if you are doing it right." People will not flock to suffer for Jesus, or to take up their cross, or deny themselves. That's the nature of discipleship. It is very exclusive. In John chapter 6, Jesus whittled a crowd of 6,000 down to 12. Wouldn't that have looked good on His resume? Imagine if He were to apply to many churches today: "Well, I managed to build a congregation of 6,000 down to 12." That's church growth, according to Jesus. Maybe we need to reexamine our views on church growth.

There is a difference between Jesus' saying "Come to Me," and "Come after Me." I think there's a technical difference here. Small words, but great significance. When He says, "Come to Me," He's inviting people to salvation. When He says, "Come after Me," He is saying the same as "Follow Me," or "Be My disciple." I think it comes out in Matthew 11:28-30 very clearly. What I see here is that He is actually extending both invitations. To those Jews who were lost in the hopelessness of a pharisaical system, burdened by the requirements of the law, He said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." I think that is His invitation to salvation - "Come to Me...I will give you rest," the "rest" of righteousness, the "rest" of peace with God and of reconciliation with God, the "rest" that the pharisaical system can not give under its burden of law-keeping. And then He says, "Take My yoke upon you." "Now that you've come,

you take. Now that you've received, you learn from me," He says. "For I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls." "Rest" speaks of the fellowship that can now be enjoyed with God, "for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The whole figure of a yoke implies obligation, commitment, and duty. I find both invitations here: "Come to Me," and then "Take up and learn from Me." I have no problem with the way that Jesus offered those invitations, but they are distinct. There is a big difference between believing and behaving, between receiving eternal life and taking up the cross for Jesus Christ.

Conclusion I'll just conclude with a few practical exhortations. When we teach about discipleship, let's be sure to keep it distinct from eternal salvation, but related. Jesus did say, "Go and make disciples" and the key verb in that passage, as you may know, is "make disciples." The going probably implies the evangelism process, but His end result is that we are to make disciples of people. I believe that is why the Book of Acts uses the term "disciples" synonymously with "believers." It's bridging from the gospels where we are told to make disciples into what actually happened. People became enthusiastic followers of Jesus Christ. That's the norm for the Book of Acts, with but rare exceptions that are noted. Discipleship should follow salvation, and salvation should flow into discipleship. How will that shape your ministry then? I saw a cartoon once of someone opening the nursery door in a hospital and a little baby is crawling out, and the nurse is saying, "Good luck!" Dr. Radmacher says that we could be jailed for child-abuse or child-neglect. What do we want to do with those who come to know Christ as their Savior? Do they understand what discipleship is? Do we want to lead them further?

We ought to learn to disciple from a grace perspective, to keep grace first. It is the motivation to follow. The heart of discipleship is not what we do, but who we are in Christ. Unfortunately, I have seen that most discipleship material begins not with who we are, but with what we should do, leaving the impression that if we establish a quiet time, if we establish a prayer life, if we read our Bibles regularly, or memorize a certain number of verses, then we are disciples. Those things are important. Those things may be very necessary for spiritual growth, but that's not where God starts. He starts by telling us who we are in Christ. My friends, when somebody has the motivation, all the how-to's and all the disciplines will work themselves out eventually. When I first became a Christian, I did not go to a church for about a year and a half, but I was so motivated by the love and the grace of God that I would stay up until 3 o'clock in the morning reading my Bible. I didn't need anybody to check it off on a list for me. Give them the motivation. Give them the reason. Give them the goal. And then help them with the disciplines along the way.

I've spent a lot of time thinking about this. I was asked to write some discipleship materials, and I've written and finished the rough draft. I spent a lot of time thinking about the approach I wanted to use, because there are so many different approaches out there. What is the biblical approach? What I basically ended up doing was taking the Book of Romans and saying, "Here's where we are going: This is what has happened to you. This is who you are. Now let's talk about what you should do." It makes more sense to me. It's more biblical to me. Ground them in grace. Motivate them and fire them up with grace. People will find a way to pray. They will find a way to read their Bible. A soldier at Ft. Hood, Texas, was looking forward to seeing his girlfriend in Chicago. Then they had a security breach, and they had to close the fort down. They wouldn't let anybody in and they wouldn't let anybody out. So he was greatly disappointed. Finally he decided, "I'm going for it." He starts running toward the front gate, and the guard says, "Stop!" But he keeps running

towards it and the guard says, "Stop or I'll shoot!" The young soldier said, "Look, my mama's in heaven, my papa's in hell, my girlfriend's in Chicago, and I'm gonna see one of them tonight!" You just give people the motivation; they'll find a way.

Motivation is what is so lacking, I believe, in our Christian teaching. The motivation of the Kingdom, the motivation of rewards, the motivation of love, the motivation of grace, and the motivation of duty. If motivated, people will find a way. No wonder Jesus made love the first commandment. Maybe He knew what He was doing. He says, "You just love, and you'll keep all the other commands."

Learn to disciple from grace. Teach people who they are. Make that part of your discipleship process and materials.

Another application might be that Christians who coast should be taught that that is not pleasing to God. We have an obligation and a duty to tell people who are Christians that God wants them to move on in the Christian life and not to stay in spiritual infancy or to remain in their diapers. They should not be comfortable in their diapers. If they are, we should hold their diapers in their face, make them smell the smell, make them feel uneasy. Christians who coast are not appreciating the grace of God, and we need to talk to them about it.

Let me leave you with one thought: Christians have never changed the world - only disciples have. So what are you going to do about it? What commitments are you going to make? What is God asking you to do, where you are, on your journey today? How will you challenge people to go on to a productive and fruitful life of discipleship? The cost of discipleship is high, but the rewards are great!

Dr. Charlie Bing, GraceLife Ministries

1 This article is from a message originally delivered March 31, 1999 at the Grace Evangelical Society's fourth annual conference. It has been edited slightly for publication.

2 John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 21.

3 Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Ashville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 65.

4 Bailey E. Smith, *The Grace Escape: Jesus as Savior and Lord* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), xviii, 97.

5 J. Wallis, "Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience," *Sojourners* (March 1976): 21.

6 J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 73.

7 See Charlie's other message also delivered at the conference and published in the previous issue of this journal: "Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Salvation," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 12 (Spring 1999): 21-35.

8 MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 140.

9 See Matthew 10:37-39; Matthew 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-26; Luke 14:25-33; John 8:31. For a detailed discussion of these passages as well as the whole issue of Lordship Salvation's understanding of discipleship and salvation, see Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991) GraceLife edition (Burleson, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 1997).

10 Bing, *Lordship Salvation*, 150-52.

01.08. Church Discipline: A Necessary Partner to the Grace Gospel - Grace in Focus, Nov. 1998

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Church Discipline: A Necessary Partner to the Grace Gospel -
Grace in Focus, Nov. 1998

Synopsis:

Yes, Christians can continue in sin, or the biblical admonitions church for church discipline wouldn't make sense. When President Clinton admitted immorality in the White House, the head of the Southern Baptist Convention and a seminary president called for Clinton's home church in Arkansas to exercise "biblical church discipline." The Associated Press article that reported this added, "The practice is seldom used in the modern church." That is unfortunate in the sense that when exercised biblically, church discipline not only upholds God's righteous standard for His people, but also displays God's love and grace towards those who sin. The Bible's teaching on church discipline is also one of the strongest supports for the Free Grace view of the gospel and the Christian life.

Church Discipline Requires Us to Be Realistic About the Presence of Sin in Christians

Recently our country was appalled by more than we wanted to know about our President's immoral behavior. Yet healing for the nation demands the full and honest exposure of such behavior. In the same interest of truth and healing, the Bible pulls no punches in describing the depth of sin of which Christians are capable. In the OT there are plenty of examples of extremely sinful behavior by saved individuals. Examples include Abraham's cowardly lies about his wife, Judah's fornication with a prostitute, King David's murder and adultery, Solomon's idolatry and adultery, and Jonah's deliberate disobedience. Likewise, the NT has examples of Christians who sin grievously. Peter denied Christ and the gospel; Ananias and Sapphira lied publicly to impress others with their piety, a Corinthian believer committed incest; and a segment of the Corinthian church abused the Lord's Supper with selfish inconsideration and drunkenness. The simplest way to deal with gross sin in Christians is to say that the sinner is not a Christian to begin with. But the above examples do not allow that conclusion. Even so, the remedy would then be to get the person saved. But that is not the remedy suggested for these sinners. The Bible passages on church discipline are a lesson in theology. Though forgiven and born again, Christians maintain a great capacity for sin (albeit a greater capacity for righteousness through Jesus Christ!). Biblical instructions demand that the church face the reality of sin in certain Christians in the church. In his concluding remarks about the incestuous man, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 that we are to judge those in the church, not those outside the church. What are we judging? Sinful behavior of course. For the incestuous man this meant potential excommunication. Of course, sometimes God doesn't wait for the church to initiate procedures, but takes disciplinary action Himself. This seems to be true in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-42) and the abusers of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:1-34). But there is no indication that God condemned them to hell. These people

are presented as part of the church, which is why their sins were so grievous in the first place. In reference to the Corinthians' abuses of the Lord's Supper, Paul says that some of them "sleep," which is a euphemism for a Christian's death (1 Corinthians 11:30). The same is true in the case of the incestuous man. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:5 that God would allow Satan to afflict his body--"the destruction of the flesh"--with the aim that he would be restored to spiritual wellness--"that his spirit may be saved." Paul uses the word save [sodzo] here as a play on words contrasting physical illness with spiritual wellness. Sodzo is often used in the NT to refer to restoration to wellness (compare Matthew 9:21-22; Mark 5:23, Mark 5:28, Mark 5:34, Mark 6:56, Mark 10:52, Luke 7:50, Luke 8:36, Luke 8:48, Luke 8:50, Luke 17:19, Luke 18:42, Acts 4:9, Acts 14:9, James 5:15). The errant believer needed restoration to be properly prepared for the Judgment Seat of the Christ ("the day of the Lord Jesus"). As Christians committed to grace, we can face the reality of believers who sin. God teaches us to deal with it, not deny it or sweep it under the carpet of "false profession." Since discipline has the goal of restoration, it is an extension of God's grace available to fallen believers.

Church Discipline Is a Family Matter

Simply put, I don't discipline my neighbors' kids. I discipline my own children. This echoes God's own practice in Hebrews 12:5-11. God sometimes deals harshly (but lovingly) with His children, but this only confirms that they are indeed His own children. It is no surprise, then, that God sometimes prescribes that the church deal harshly (but lovingly) with its sinning family members, who are also His children, precisely because they are His children. As we study the descriptions of those who are sinning in the passages on church discipline, we find they are clearly in the Christian family. In Matthew 18:15, the sinner is a "brother" in the church. Even at the end of the process, it does not say he is to be called an unbeliever, but only treated as one (Matthew 18:17). In 1 Corinthians 5:11 Paul refers to those who sin and are "named a brother." This certainly includes the incestuous man whom Paul hoped would be restored to spiritual wellness via chastisement (1 Corinthians 5:5). The command to "restore" a sinner in Galatians 6:1 assumes salvation because fellowship with God and His people is the goal of that restoration. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 2 Thessalonians 3:15, the disorderly man is called a "brother." In each of these cases, no one is ever called an unbeliever, nor is there any implication that they are unsaved. As the evidence shows, it is quite the opposite. Church discipline is God's method of taking care of family business. It is as much a reality of church life as spanking or discipline is a matter of family life when raising children. It may not be pleasant; in fact, it may be quite unpleasant or embarrassing at times. But we are obligated to lovingly and graciously deal with it.

Church Discipline Is a Ministry of Grace

Good parents discipline their children to train them to be good and to do right. Discipline is also a way to restore harmony in relationships in the family. It is the same in the church. Along with these positive goals, the process must also reflect love and grace.

Grace teaches us to be godly (Titus 2:11-12). The gracious goal of church discipline is to teach the sinning Christian to be godly and to restore him or her to a harmonious family relationship with God as Father and Christians as brothers and sisters. Punishment in the sense of just retribution is reserved for unbelievers. Discipline is ultimately an exercise of love, albeit tough love, and grace. Punishment is an exercise of justice. The goal of the Matthew 18:1-35 discipline is to restore the

sinner to the one sinned against (Matthew 18:15). In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Paul's command has a dual purpose: to protect the church family from impure influence (1 Corinthians 5:6-7), and to return the sinner to harmony with his church family and with God, which was accomplished (2 Corinthians 2:6-10). The Galatians 6:1 directive seeks the sinner's restoration. Paul's instructions in 2 Thessalonians 3:15 are to bring the sinner to repentance: "that he may be ashamed." The process of church discipline is also full of grace. Matthew 18:15-17 tells how to protect confidentiality and insure fairness with plenty of opportunity for the sinner to repent. In 2 Corinthians 2:7-8 Paul urges the church to forgive, comfort, and assure the repentant man of their love. Galatians 6:1 commands the confronter(s) to have a spirit of gentleness and humility. Paul's overall tone is suggested in 2 Thessalonians 3:15 : treat the sinning one like a brother.

Church discipline has everyone's best interests in mind, including God's. It reflects God's healing and forgiving grace to those who have sinned. It is a legitimate ministry of any church committed to grace theology and to loving its people.

Conclusion The reality is that there will always be sin in the church until the Lord returns for her. We must deal with sin in the church, not deny it or dismiss it.

It is a bit too convenient to simply claim that a sinning person loses salvation or was never saved. This short-circuits the goal of restoration and growth through disciplinary training. My personal experience is that exercising church discipline is the most unpleasant side of church ministry. I abhor doing it. But it is a reality we face, if only rarely. When we do, grace is our greatest ally. It tells us how to view the person--as a Christian who sins. It also tells us how to deal with the person--with tough love and humility. And grace tells us how to restore the person--with full forgiveness.

01.09. The Condition for Salvation in John's Gospel...

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing The Condition for Salvation in John's Gospel - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1996

Synopsis:

John is the only book in the Bible written with the explicitly stated purpose of bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life. It is crucial that we know what it says about the condition for eternal salvation.

Biblically and historically, justification through faith in Jesus Christ (or salvation by grace through faith) has been the center of the Christian Gospel. Recently, Carl Henry called justification "a doctrine in crisis."¹ Indeed, not only the nature of justification is being challenged (imputed versus imparted righteousness) as he notes, but its condition of faith alone is also being challenged. If evangelical Christianity is to remain distinct from all other religions and aberrations, then defense of the Faith must begin with defense of faith as the only condition of justification (which we here call salvation).

There is a great controversy within our churches and theological schools threatening the unconditional Gospel of grace by compromising faith alone as the condition for salvation. From the beginning of the church, defense of the Faith focused largely on the apostles' explanation, reiteration, and defense of faith alone as the condition of salvation. This is the explicit concern of the epistles to the Romans and Galatians, and it surfaces as well in some other epistles, such as Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and First John. Centuries later, the battle cry of the Reformation was sola fide, and so perhaps it must be heard again today. The evangelical church is in need of a decisive authoritative voice in defense of sola fide as the condition and confirmation of salvation. This must include an overwhelming argument that faith alone saves as well as a delineation of what faith is and what it is not.

Actually, the church has always had such a voice, but that voice has been muzzled or ignored to a great degree. The church needs to listen to the Gospel of John to shape its understanding of the condition for salvation.

John's Gospel explicitly states that it was written to bring people to salvation. Yet its message and language does not receive preeminent treatment in the Gospel debate. When it does, its simple message is often obscured or tainted by theological baggage or presuppositions. In this article, I will discuss the purpose of John's Gospel and why it should be determinative in our discussion of the condition for salvation. I will discuss John's use of the word believe in his Gospel and show how John's analogies for belief support faith alone as the one and only condition for salvation. Also significant is what John does not use to present the condition for salvation. Obviously, there will be very important practical implications from this study.

I. The Purpose of John

John's Gospel is distinguished from the Synoptic Gospels by its unique selection of material not found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is commonly observed that 92% of its material is unique when compared to the Synoptics. It is also commonly agreed that this material presents a more doctrinal reflection in contrast to the more historical approaches of the Synoptic accounts. This can be clearly seen when John's prologue is compared to those of the Synoptics. Also, assuming a later date for John could posit a more mature theological expression of the Gospel and the condition for salvation related to the relevant issues of the day.²

These unique features should give extra weight to what John says about salvation and how it is obtained. Most helpful, however, is John's own statement of purpose. A propitious distinctive of John's Gospel is his unequivocal statement of why he wrote it. He declares in John 20:30-31 : And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Three corresponding emphases are evident in this purpose statement. First, it declares Jesus is the divine Son, the revelation of God: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." This merely continues the obvious emphasis on Jesus' deity in the Gospel. It also explains why John declares in John 20:30 that only certain miracles were recorded. Besides the explicit statements, it is commonly observed that deity is revealed through the selection of miraculous signs that Jesus performs (cf. John 10:37-38; John 14:10-11) and the "I am" statements He makes.³ In short, the book begins and ends with Christ's deity. A second emphasis, more germane to our discussion, is the presentation of belief as the proper response to this revelation about Jesus Christ: "that you may believe." The evangelistic intent is obvious.⁴ It is hardly necessary to show that Christ's deity revealed by word or miracle in this Gospel is typically followed by someone believing or by an appeal to believe.

Furthering the argument for evangelistic intent is the third emphasis that presents eternal life as the result of belief: "that believing you may have life in His name."⁵ Since Jesus Himself is life (John 1:4, John 14:6), eternal life is defined in terms of quality and experience more than quantity and duration (John 10:10).⁶ Eternal life is not an end, but the beginning of a relationship with the living God through Christ (John 17:3) that is enhanced through a subsequent life of faith. It has been said that the only thing better than winning a million dollars is spending it! John shows that faith in Christ secures the prize but also enjoys the prize. Thus the discourse to the disciples in John 13:1-38, John 14:1-31, John 15:1-27, John 16:1-33, John 17:1-26 easily fits into this purpose of deepening our present experience of the eternal life God shares with us who believe.⁷

John's purpose was to induce and foster faith in the Son of God for eternal life. One commentator expressed John's purpose as the "birth, growth, and completing of faith in the disciples."⁸ The church at large has always taken John's purpose in John 20:31 at face value and understood this Gospel's intent to lead people to faith and a full life. Through the ages, believers have probably used John more than any other piece of literature to confront people with the Gospel. A modern illustration of this is the millions of pocket Gospels of John that have been distributed for over a century to share the Good News.

II. How the Condition for Salvation Is Presented We can now observe some peculiarities about how John states and pictures the condition for salvation.

A. The Clear Condition

Given John's clear purpose, we would expect to see a clear condition for receiving eternal life, and we do. That condition is most frequently expressed by the verb *pisteu*) "believe," which is used 98 times in John (compared to 34 times in the Synoptics and 16 times in the rest of the NT). The significance of its verbal form is that it is presented as a response to the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It is not static, but dynamic.

Much discussion has focused on the use of the verb *pisteu*) either absolutely, or with the prepositions *eis* and *epi*, or with the dative case or *hoti*. While some would claim these constructions indicate different kinds of faith,⁹ a long discussion can be shortened by noting the many exegetes and theologians who recognize that all these combinations refer to saving faith.¹⁰

Likewise, both Morris and Tenney grant that believe without an object implies no less than believe with an object as when prepositions are used.¹¹ The prepositions *eis* and *epi* may emphasize the object of faith, but do not distinguish another kind of faith. The construction of *pisteu*) with the dative is also clearly used for salvation, as in John 5:24. Jesus said, "whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life."¹² The similarity of believe with the dative and believe in is seen in John 6:29-30 and John 8:30-31. It is exegetically impossible to separate their meanings in those passages. To believe Christ is to believe in Him, and vice versa. Thus the slightly less certain construction is clarified by John's favorite term for saving faith, believe in. The *pisteu*) plus *hoti* construction also denotes saving faith. While some may argue that this combination denotes an intellectual acquiescence that falls short of effectual faith, it seems obvious that one cannot believe in unless he or she also believes that. As Nygren argues, "Each implies the other . . . In fact, if one really believes that, one can hardly not believe in."¹³ We find the *hoti* construction in two passages that clearly discuss the condition for salvation. John 8:24 says "if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." The other passage is no less than John's purpose statement, John 20:31 (cf. also 1 John 5:1).

Morris's summary statement on the various uses of *pisteu*) recognizes the essential meaning of trustful reliance for them all: The conclusion to which we come is that, while each of the various constructions employed has its own proper sense, they must not be too sharply separated from each other...Whichever way the terminology is employed it stresses the attitude of trustful reliance on God which is basic for the Christian.¹⁴

Faith, then, when represented by *pisteu*) in its various forms denotes trust in something or someone. It assumes assent to the truthfulness and trustworthiness of a person or what is claimed. In John, faith is trustful reliance on Christ's promise to give eternal life to those who believe.

B. The Consistent Effect

Another pattern we see is the consistent effect of believing, which is salvation. Though sometimes faith is underdeveloped, faulty, weak, or minimal, it is always sufficient for eternal life. Since faith alone is sufficient, assurance is possible. Jesus said that whoever believes "has" (present tense) eternal life and "has passed" (perfect tense) from death into life (John 5:24). This is the present possession of the believer. The blind man who was given sight was able to declare "Lord, I believe!" (John 9:38), though it took him some time to come to that point of faith. In John, salvation

is not conditioned on how one believes, but whom one believes, or not the kind of faith, but the object of faith.

If this is the case in the clear preponderance of uses of believe in John's Gospel, then the burden of proof lies on anyone who would except two passages which are admittedly troublesome, John 2:23-24 and John 8:30-31. While we must relegate an explanation of these passages to an appendix, we state our conclusion here: There is persuasive evidence in both passages that belief results in salvation. There are no convincing reasons for pleading here a special use of believe that falls short of salvation.

C. The Comparative Pictures

While there is one condition for salvation, John may represent that condition with figures of speech designed to illustrate the response of faith.

Look. In John 3:14-15 the anticipated response is to look upon Christ and His work for eternal salvation, as the Israelites looked upon the serpent on a pole in the desert for their physical salvation (Numbers 21:1-35). The point of the illustration is the simple look of faith. This is quite contrary to the author who writes, "In order to look at the snake on the pole, they had to drag themselves to where they could see it."¹⁵ Such exegesis is theologically driven and violates the clear intention of the serpent illustration as used by our Lord.

Hear. Similarly, John uses hearing to represent believing. More than the physical sense is involved. To hear is to listen, but also to accept as true, as we understand with the colloquial expression, "I hear you." Belonging to Jesus as His sheep is conditioned upon hearing His voice of truth (John 10:16, John 10:27), as also is obtaining eternal life (John 5:24). The unbelief of the lost is due to their not hearing God's word (John 8:43, John 8:47).

Enter. Speaking metaphorically of Himself as the door to the sheepfold, Jesus also pictures the response of faith as entering the door (John 10:9). To enter correlates with faith in that both express one's trust for protection from the threat of the enemy.

Feed. The notion of feeding on Christ (John 6:57), including eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:54), is another analogy of the faith that obtains eternal life, as is clear in John 6:35 and John 6:47. This is similar to the drink of living water (eternal life) offered to the Samaritan woman (John 4:10, John 10:14). To eat and drink is to appropriate or receive something upon which life depends. There is no work or merit associated with these activities. Rather, the benefit is from what is appropriated, which corresponds to the object of faith, which is Christ.

Come. Another metaphor for faith is expressed by the word come. In John 5:40 coming to Christ obtains eternal life. In John 6:35 come is equated with both eating and believing. Coming, drinking, and believing are used synonymously in John 7:37-38 as the condition for salvation. To come is to trustingly approach Christ for help. It entails no human merit or effort.¹⁶

Receive. Another word that may represent faith is receive. The promise that any who receive Christ will become children of God is closely linked to believing in John 1:12. Believe appears to be in apposition to receive here in order to explain it.¹⁷ In John 1:12 to receive is to welcome or accept as true the person or words of Jesus Christ (John 3:11, John 3:32-33, John 5:43). This is in contrast to those who "did not know" and "did not receive" Jesus as the Christ in John 1:10-11.

These pictures of faith all denote receptivity, agreement, or trust. All are essentially simple activities and essentially passive. None communicates the idea of merit, work, effort, or achievement. Neither do they communicate an exchange of one's life or the ongoing submission of one's life to Jesus as Master in order to obtain eternal life. When we observe the clear statements in John about the condition for salvation, the effect of this condition, and the pictures of this condition, we conclude that John presents faith alone in Christ alone as the only condition for salvation.

III. How the Condition for Salvation Is Not Presented Just as we pay attention to the peculiarities present in John's Gospel, we also note what is peculiarly absent.

A. The Absence of Qualifiers

It is extremely significant that we do not see qualifiers with the word believe. John does not condition salvation on whether one "really believes" or "truly believes." Neither does he speak of "genuine faith," "real faith," or "effectual faith." There is only one kind of faith. One either believes in something or he does not. Therefore, those who speak of "spurious faith" or "false faith" are psychologizing faith as the Scripture neither does, nor provides a basis for doing. In contrast, John does use qualifiers to distinguish the real from the fraudulent in other concepts. He speaks of the "true light" (John 1:9), "true bread" (John 6:32), "true vine" (John 15:1), "true worshipers" (John 4:23), and "true God" (John 17:3). When he shows that even the unsaved can be referred to as disciples (John 6:60-64), he later calls the saved who adhere to His word "disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

B. The Absence of Other Conditions

Also in John, we do not see other conditions attached to faith or any condition replacing faith. For example, the word repent does not even occur once in John. In spite of the strained efforts of some to impose repentance on the salvation accounts in John 18:1-40 we find the opposite. In the incident of the woman at the well (John 4:1-26), Jesus' disclosure of the Samaritan woman's multiple mates would have been a perfect time to call her to repentance from this sin. Instead we find eternal life offered on the condition of asking (John 4:10) and drinking (John 4:14), both expressions of believing. Of course, this is no problem to those who view repentance as a change of heart needed for salvation. Faith is the more specific way of expressing this change of heart because it focuses on Christ and His salvation from sin. Paul seemed to overlap the two concepts in the phrase "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

Neither do we find the condition for salvation stated as surrender or commitment of all of one's life to Jesus as Master.¹⁹ Salvation is totally and absolutely free and is not conditioned on human merit. It is what one receives, not earns, merits, or barter for. It will be given freely to whoever asks (John 4:10).

Similarly, we do not find salvation conditioned on continual obedience. If anything, we could argue that John's Gospel purposefully introduces us to those who believed in Jesus as Savior, but were less than fully committed as disciples or were partially obeying Him. Martha believed and was obviously saved (John 11:27; and we can assume Mary and Lazarus were too), but there is no indication that she followed Christ in the fullest sense of leaving home and family. Less than full confession and commitment are also found in the "secret disciple," Joseph of Arimathea (John

19:38). Some would argue that Nicodemus was also in this category (cf. John 19:39). In addition, the Jewish rulers mentioned in John 12:42 believed in Christ, but did not confess Him publicly for fear of being ostracized by the other Jewish leaders.²⁰ The significance of John's lack of embellishment of faith and the absence of any other conditions emphasizes this one condition as the sole and sufficient means of obtaining eternal life. In terms of the data, what is present and what is absent, there is an overwhelming case presented in John for faith alone in Christ alone as the only condition for salvation. This is in perfect agreement with his purpose stated in John 20:31.

John has spoken definitively on what it takes to be saved. His presentation carries the weight of his purpose for writing, "that you may believe." Let the debate over the Gospel begin with John's Gospel, unless we would accuse him of preaching half a gospel or easy-believism, or charge him with compromising the Gospel, acquiescing to the modern culture, or cheapening the Gospel. If we are to defend the Faith, then we must begin by defending faith alone in Christ alone, a simple, unconditional, non-meritorious response of accepting and trusting in God's promise.

IV. Some Practical Implications

If John has written the book on how to be saved, then we should submit our thinking to it and allow our ministries to be shaped by it. Yet how often do we hear salvation explained in terminology not found in the Bible or confused with other demands Jesus makes of those already saved?

Here are some important implications which flow from our study of John's presentation of salvation:

First, we must give people something to believe. Since it is the object of faith that saves, there must be meaningful content about that object, which is Jesus Christ Himself. We should present Jesus as the Son of God who died for our sins (John 1:29) and rose again. Content-less emotional appeals are not enough. It will do no good to call people to believe in something empty or erroneous.

Second, we must invite people to believe in Christ as their Savior. Christ's revelation demands a response. But let us invite them to believe, not "ask Him into your heart," "give your life to Christ," "surrender to Him as Lord," or any other unbiblical notions. This kind of unclear, erroneous, and confusing language will obscure the simple message of sola fide. We should be prepared to explain what it means to believe with appropriate illustrations or comparisons.

Third, we can assure people of their salvation on the basis of their having believed in God's Word. Faith in God's promise of eternal life is not the only form of assurance of salvation, but it is sufficient assurance to which any other assurance is secondary. Let's not lead them to conditions that are certainly not found in John's presentation.

Fourth, we must emphasize God's Free Grace in our Gospel. It is for those who ask, receive, or believe. We must keep salvation as simple (though not always easy) as John did. We should normally be positive in our approach, not condemning, as John depicts Jesus. If we choose to preach repentance, we must explain what it means and how it relates to faith so that it does not become another condition for salvation. But let us also admit that it was important enough to John that repentance not be included in his Gospel of Belief. To John, the sin that condemns is unbelief, and the only cure for this in his Gospel is belief.

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18) Dr. Charlie Bing, GraceLife Ministries

APPENDIX Does Belief Result in Salvation in John 2:23-24 and John 8:30-31?

John 2:23-24 The reaction of Jesus in John 2:24, "Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men," causes many to argue that those in John 2:23 who "believed in His name when they saw the signs that He did" did not believe unto salvation. They argue that: 1) These only believed in Christ's name, not His person; 2) They only believed in the signs, not in Christ as Messiah; 3) Jesus rejected their faith in John 2:24. In answer, we first observe that there is no explicit denial of the reality of true faith in this passage. "Believed in His name" in John 2:23 would more normally be taken to refer to salvation as in John 1:12, John 3:18 (negative), and John 20:31. It is commonly agreed that the construction *pisteu) eis* is John's premier technical term for saving faith. Why did John use this language when he could easily have used a different expression?

Second, though signs prompted this faith, faith had as its object "His name," not His signs. Faith prompted by signs is seen elsewhere in John (John 1:47-49, John 2:11, John 4:52-53, John 10:41-42, John 11:42, John 11:45, John 20:26-29). Jesus even encouraged faith based on signs (John 1:50-51, John 10:37-38, John 14:11) and the apostle John expected signs to induce faith (John 12:37, John 20:31). The ultimate miraculous sign, the resurrection, was expected to prompt faith as well.

Third, the use of *pisteu)* in John 2:24, usually translated "commit," is evidently a word-play on the use of *pisteu)* in John 2:23. It is used to indicate Jesus' lack of confidence in these believers based on His supernatural knowledge of their level of commitment. Nothing explicit is said about their salvation experience. If it is assumed they were genuinely saved, Jesus did not want to commit Himself in the sense of further disclosure and an intimate relationship with them which is conditioned upon obedience and full confession of faith (John 14:23, John 15:14-15). The immature commitment of "untrustworthy believers" is a subtle motif in John (John 9:22, John 12:42-43, John 19:38).²¹ It simply makes more sense to interpret the unclear clause, "Jesus did not commit Himself to them" in light of the clearer language of "believed in His name." Jesus would not reveal more of Himself to those not fully confessing Him.

John 8:30-31

Again, a clear statement about saving faith is doubted by some because of what follows. Though John 8:30 says, "many believed in Him," using the clear *pisteu) eis* construction, John 8:31 refers to them as "those Jews who believed Him" with the *pisteu)* construction lacking a preposition. Also, the condition for discipleship given in John 8:31 is equated with salvation and it is claimed the hostility of these false believers continues (John 8:33 ff.) and Jesus calls them "children of the devil" (John 8:44). As for the first argument, we have already shown how *pisteu)* without the preposition does not prove faith is inadequate for salvation. The immediate context (John 8:24) verifies that salvation can be expressed by *pisteu)* without the preposition.

Second, the condition for discipleship in John 8:31 should not be construed as an admonition to unbelievers. The opposite is indicated by the emphatic pronoun *hymeis*, which distinguishes the

believing Jews from the rest of the Jews who oppose Jesus. Besides, Jesus does not admonish these believers to enter His word, but to abide or continue in it. The aorist subjunctive "if you abide" indicates a difference among the believers, as does the qualifier αὐτοὶς, "indeed". These who are assumed to be in His word through faith are now given the condition of abiding for further knowledge of the truth and freedom in Christ. Elsewhere in John, intimate discipleship is conditioned on love and obedience (e.g., John 13:35, John 14:15, John 14:21, John 14:23, John 15:4, John 15:7, John 15:10, John 15:14).

Third, the hostile objections of John 8:33 ff reflect the continuing hostility of the unbelieving Jews, a major motif of this section. In John 8:33 the abrupt change of tone from John 8:30-31 resumes this motif, making it unnecessary to identify the speakers; the Jews had raised objections from the start of the dialogue (John 8:13, John 8:19, John 8:22, John 8:25). John's commentary in John 8:30 is inserted before Jesus' remarks to notify the reader of a change of focus by Christ before the opposition resumes in John 8:33. It is characteristic of John to insert these editorial explanations (cf. John 8:27-28). The objection of John 8:33 is totally out of character with the inclination of those mentioned in John 8:30-32, as is also the declaration that those opposing Christ are children of the devil (John 8:44).

Saving faith is the most reasonable way to understand this passage. Such an interpretation prevents Christ, who says in John 8:45, "you do not believe Me," from contradicting John in John 8:30-31 who said they both "believed in Him" and "believed Him." It is certainly better than calling these people "unbelieving believers."

Endnotes

*This paper was originally presented at the 1995 Evangelical Theological Society Conference in Philadelphia, PA The original title was "The Contribution of John's Gospel to the Salvation Controversy. Ed.

1 Carl F. H. Henry, "A Doctrine in Crisis," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (March 1995), 57-65.

2 See Moisés Silva, "Approaching the Fourth Gospel," *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1988), 25. A later date is a common conclusion, notwithstanding J. A. T. Robinson's earlier dating argued in *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976) and *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley (London: SCM 1995). Carson's date is AD 80-85. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 85-86.

3 See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 350 n. 43, 365, 447, and C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), 345.

4 Whether the present or aorist tense of πιστεύω is taken in 20:31, the evangelistic intent is preserved. See Silva, 22, and D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987), 640.

5 Carson, "Purpose," 648.

6 Dodd, 149; Rudolf Bultmann, "Zaw," *TDNT*, 2:870.

7 Carson, "Purpose," 649-50. He shows how chapters 13-17 can support an evangelistic purpose, though we may not agree with his approach.

8 Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), 227.

9E.g., Gentry, "The Great Option," BRR 5:55-56; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 272; Dodd, 184.

10Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), 494; Rudolf Bultmann, s.v. "Pisteu{," TDNT 6:203; Richard Christianson, "The Soteriological Significance of PISTEUW in the Gospel of John," (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1987); Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1983), 101; Elizabeth Jarvis, "The Key Term 'Believe' in the Gospel of John," *Notes on Translation* 2 (1988): 46-51; Morris, 337; E. Herbert Nygren, "Faith and Experience," *The Covenant Quarterly* 41 (August 1983): 41-42; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:561.

11Morris, 337; Merrill C. Tenney, "Topics from the Gospel of John, Part IV: The Growth of Belief," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (July 1968): 343.

12Here the NIV is quoted rather than the NKJV, which inserts the preposition "in." The NKJV following the KJV probably felt the dative allowed for the addition, as did the Jerusalem, NEB, and CEV Bible.

13Nygren, 42.

14Morris, 337.

15John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 45-46.

16To come to Christ for salvation should not be confused with come after Christ, which is the expression used for the commitment of following Christ in a life of discipleship. See Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23; Johannes Schneider, s.v. "Ercomai," in TDNT 2 (1964): 66; Wolfgang Bauder, s.v. "opisw," in NIDNTT 1 (1975): 492-93.

17Westcott, 9.

18E.g., see MacArthur's comments on the conversion of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. MacArthur, Jr., 40, 46, 54, 58. Also see Walter J. Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970; reprint, 1985), 48-49.

19Some try to make this point from pisteuw in 2:24. See the appendix for a discussion.

20Agreeing that the rulers were saved are: J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary in the Gospel According to St. John*, 2 vols., *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 2:452; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 2:487; Morris, 605. Verse 42 is introduced by a strong adversative ($\text{\textbraceleft} \text{\textomws} \text{\textbraceleft}$), denoting an exception that contrasts these believers with

the nation which Isaiah prophesied would not believe (12:37-41). This verse offers hope that individuals within the nation could still be saved. If they were not actually saved, the contrast is muted and made meaningless.

21 For an excellent development of this motif, see Zane C. Hodges, "Untrustworthy Believers--John 2:23-25," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (April-June 1978):139-52.

01.10. What Must I Do to Be Saved? - Grace in Focus, Mark 1996

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing What Must I Do to Be Saved? - Grace in Focus, Mark. 1996

Synopsis: A simple question in Acts 16:1-40 receives a simple answer that we have been arguing about ever since! Here is a clear and simple explanation of the condition for eternal salvation.

Two thousand years ago a very frightened man asked a very simple question: "What must I do to be saved?" The original answer was as short and simple as the question: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Leave it to us theologians to twist this into a monumental debate that divides Christians. Nevertheless, it remains the crucial question of life, and it must be settled before we tell one more person about Christ. The Context of the Question The question we consider rose before the dust settled in the quaking Philippian jail. The jailer who asked it saw his life flash before him in the earthquake itself. Now he faced a second dark reality: The prisoners had escaped and he would be executed by the Roman command for allowing it.

Suicide seemed a better option. But Paul's loud plea saved his life. "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!" That Paul and Silas had spent the night worshipping and now expressed this concern for his welfare disclosed to the jailer a deeper need. Thus his question. And thus the answer we examine.

There are two ways some make Paul's simple answer as complicated as an IRS tax form. First, they say that believing is doing something. After all, the jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Second, they use the object of faith to define the nature of faith. Let's examine this reasoning. The Nature of Faith In whatever way we understand do, we cannot be consistent with the Bible if we take it to mean more than the passive reception of something that is true. That is the nature of faith or believing. In John 6:1-71, the Jews asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28). In other words, they wanted to know what works God required them to do for eternal life. But Jesus' answer startled them: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). They could not be saved by doing works. God's only requirement was belief in His Son.

Furthermore, if we define believe as surrender, commit, or obey, we revert back to a salvation by works. It is impossible that faith could in any way be a work of merit or something done to earn God's favor: "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Romans 4:4-5).

Paul was simply telling the jailer to accept something as true, to trust in the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. The Object of Faith In the second misunderstanding of this verse, some say that it is "the Lord Jesus Christ" who is to be believed in. That is, faith is submission to His lordship over our lives. It is making Him Master of our lives.

True, the title Lord speaks of Christ's sovereign authority and rulership over everything. But is submission to that authority demanded here as a condition for salvation? It is not, for four reasons.

First, the title Lord denotes deity before it denotes rulership. Rulership and authority are only deductions from the fact that the Lord is God. In fact, deity denotes much more than rulership. He is also Creator, Judge, Sustainer, etc. But the apostle Paul is not asking the jailer to recognize all of these offices and submit to each. To this Gentile, Lord would first and simply denote deity which would imply the authority and ability to save. And that's what the jailer wanted. Note that v 34 says he believed "in God."

Second, to refer to Jesus as Lord is to use a respectful title, but this doesn't mean that submission is explicitly demanded. Note that in v 30 the jailer addressed Paul and Silas with the respectful title, "sirs." Literally he called them "lords" using the plural form of the very same word Paul used of Jesus Christ. This shows the jailer's respect, but not his absolute submission to these men in every area of life. A person can call the Commander-in-chief "the President" or even "my President," but not be submitted to every aspect of his authority (though ideally he should!).

Third, if we demand that the jailer relate to Jesus as Master because of the title Lord, then we should also demand he relate to the other terms Jesus and Christ. Since Jesus is Christ's human name and Christ speaks of His role as the anointed one of God, the Jewish Messiah, then we should insist that the jailer also comprehend and submit to the implications of Jesus' humanity and Jewish messianic theology. But Paul does not demand or expect such theological sophistication from a pagan soldier.

Fourth, it is unreasonable to assume that a pagan Gentile soldier would comprehend all the implications of Jesus' lordship for his life, much less submit to them immediately. As an unbeliever, he was dead in sin. His request was for eternal life, or salvation from the penalty for his sin. He could not respond to the grace of God by submitting his life, for he had not yet experienced that grace.

So, what would the jailer have understood by "the Lord Jesus Christ?" Simply this: he wanted to be saved, and this One called "Lord" had the authority and power to save him. There is no reason to jump from the objective title Lord to the subjective demand that one submit everything to Him for salvation.

Faith is Simple

Faith is faith regardless of the object. The faith it takes to sit in a chair or swallow medication is in essence the same faith as the faith it takes to be saved. Faith is trusting. Faith is simple. The object of faith does not determine the nature of faith. If someone writes a check sincerely believing she has adequate funds to cover it when she really doesn't, has she believed any less than if she did have adequate funds? Of course not! Likewise, one can believe in Buddha and another believe in Christ. Both believe in the same way, but only one will be saved. What is different is the object of their faith.

Faith is simple--so simple millions miss it! Many have missed it in Acts 16:31. What must you do to be saved? The biblical answer is believe! Simply believe, only believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal salvation and you will be saved.

01.11. Grace in the final Hour - Grace in Focus, July 1996

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Grace in the final Hour - Grace in Focus, July 1996

Synopsis: Can the worst criminal be saved--even at the last minute. Here's what we can learn from the story of the thief on the cross.

Jeffrey Dahmer was convicted of unspeakable acts of perversion and cannibalism that shocked the nation. He was murdered in prison, but not before he had professed faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Ted Bundy was a notorious serial killer executed for his crimes. But before he died, he also claimed faith and forgiveness in Christ.

I recently read of a murderer executed in Texas. The newspaper reported his last words before the lethal injection. It sounded like a church testimonial as he praised God for his new-found salvation in Christ and expressed his assurance of going to heaven.

We may not know in this life if these professions were genuine, but I believe it is more than likely that they were. And that bothers me.

I don't think I could forgive someone of that sort, especially if they murdered a member of my family or any person I knew. It would torment me to think of such a person in heaven. It would not be fair! But wait. Can we not see in ourselves an aversion to God's grace? Grace is so amazing it is sometimes unbelievable.

I had a friend whose father was dying of cancer. He had only months, probably weeks, to live. He was not saved, so my friend tried to speak to him about salvation. His father's response was that he felt it was not fair to call on the Lord at the end of his life to forgive him when he had ignored and neglected Him throughout his life.

I told my friend to tell his father about the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). I referred him to one of the two criminals (as Luke calls them) who was crucified with Christ. This dying convict recognized Jesus as innocent and the King of the Jews (the Messiah) when he said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered without hesitation, "Assuredly, today you will be with me in Paradise." In this criminal's conversion there is free and unconditional forgiveness. Can you imagine those who were victims of this convict standing at the foot of his cross to witness the execution? They surely felt satisfied as human justice was fulfilled. But how would they have felt at Jesus' words of pardon? Betrayed? Outraged? It wasn't fair!

Jesus had a habit of outraging people with His love for sinners. Mockers derisively labeled Him "the friend of sinners" (Luke 7:34). He forgave a hated tax-collector (Matthew), a demonized woman (Mary Magdalene), and a blasphemer and persecutor of Christians (Saul of Tarsus). Was it fair? No. Was it love? Yes. When I recently explained salvation by grace to an unbeliever, and how Jesus the innocent died for us the guilty, he objected, "But that's not fair!"

How insightful! How true! This person was not far from the kingdom of God. At that point I knew I was explaining the Gospel clearly.

I agree with my friend's father that it is not fair to be forgiven at the end of one's life. But neither is it fair to be forgiven at any other time in one's life.

Salvation is not fair. Jesus paid it all; I can bring nothing but my sin. I can only receive the free gift. Of course it is unfair! But that is grace. That is love. And if it is unfair to forgive those who butcher other human beings, would it not also be unfair to forgive those who crucified the Son of God? That's you and me, friend. By nature, forgiveness is never fair. It says to those who are guilty of causing our pain, "I will swallow the pain. I will take the hurt and not hold it against you any longer. I will not hurt you back in the way your cruel deed really deserves." So I thank God every day that He is "unfair." Remember that God knows what it's like to lose a Son, too. But He forgives us because He loves us so.

Death-row convicts-unlikely teachers of a powerful lesson. They teach us that God's grace is truly amazing. So amazing it overwhelms human emotion, reason, and our capacity to comprehend. These men also teach us that for condemned people like us, unfair as it is, the Gospel is simple enough to give the promise of eternal life-even in life's final hour.

01.12. Keep It Clear And Simple* - Grace in Focus, Feb. 1995

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Keep It Clear And Simple* - Grace in Focus, Feb. 1995

Synopsis:

Good communication is an art--especially appreciated when it comes to sharing the gospel. Here's how to keep the content and condition clear.

Introduction

What does a person have to believe in order to be saved? I have heard everything from "Believe in God" and "Obey the Ten Commandments" (or "Obey the Sermon on the Mount") to "Just believe that Jesus loves you."

Defining the Content

Nowhere in the NT is the Gospel laid out more clearly than by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58. Paul reminds the Corinthians about the Gospel that he preached, that they received, and by which they were saved. The message was the one Paul received personally from God (1 Corinthians 15:3; cf. Galatians 1:12). In 1 Corinthians 15:4-5 we find two great propositions of the Gospel and their supporting evidence. We could diagram the verses like this:

First proposition: Christ died for our sins 1a) Scriptural proof: According to the Scriptures 1b) Physical proof: And was buried
Second proposition: He arose 2a) Scriptural proof: According to the Scriptures 2b) Physical proof: And was seen
In summoning the evidence for his propositions, Paul is arguing his case like any good lawyer (the possible oxymoron noted!). A brief explanation of each of the statements follows.

Christ died for our sins. That He died for our sins implies that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. The word "for" (hyper) conveys the idea of "on account of," i.e., to deal with our sins.

According to the Scriptures. The OT Scriptures pictured or predicted the suffering of God's Messiah (e.g., Exodus 12:1-51; Leviticus 16:1-34; Psalms 22:1-31, Psalms 110:1-7; Isaiah 52:1-15, Isaiah 53:1-12, Isaiah 54:1-17, Isaiah 55:1-13, especially Isaiah 53:4-6). And was buried. This statement functions as Jesus' death certificate. It reminds the reader of the many eyewitnesses to His death, the best evidence which could be summoned. Only dead men are buried. Christ's death was witnessed by multitudes, including the soldier sent to break His legs. The grave and body were also attended by Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the women, and soldiers sent to guard the tomb.

He arose. The second proposition attests to Christ's resurrection from the dead, which implies that God accepted the sacrifice. A dead man cannot save anyone. A Savior has to be alive. Only then can He offer and effect salvation.

According to the Scriptures. It is harder to find the resurrection of Christ in the OT. However, it is there not only explicitly (e.g., Psalms 16:8-11; Psalms 110:1), but also implicitly. When the suffering and death of the Messiah is discussed, this is often followed by a declaration of His reign (cf. Isaiah 53:1-12). The implication is clearly that He rose from the dead. And was seen. Paul lists those who were eyewitnesses. This included the apostles (men of repute), a multitude of five hundred, and himself (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

Communicating the Content

Having reviewed the biblical content of the Gospel, what errors do Christians commonly make in articulating its contents? The art here is discerning how much to say. We can say too little or too much.

Saying too little

People can be told that God loves them, but certainly that is not enough to save them. They can be convinced they are terrible sinners, but still not know how to deal with that sin. A persuasive speaker can move people to some kind of response without them knowing exactly what they are responding to. Evangelists know this. Some abuse this. Much so-called "evangelism" is more hype than substance. No wonder there are so many false professors in the church!

Saying too much A witness is not the time to dump our "smarties" on a bewildered unbeliever. Too often we try to give too much biblical data. If we start in Genesis, there's a good chance we will lose our audience by Leviticus, the Bermuda Triangle of the Bible. How much Bible did Jesus use with the woman at the well (John 4:1-54), or Paul with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:1-40)? We can tell people only what they need to know from the Bible to be saved, unless circumstances require more explanation. Having said all that, we state an important caveat: It does no good to talk about concepts like sin unless our audience has an idea of what it means. We must be careful not to assume too much biblical background for our audience.

Conclusion

Clear communication is an art. When it comes to telling the Gospel, it is an art worth refining. We must work to tell the Gospel as clearly as possible. Not always will we succeed. But isn't it a wonderful fact of life that God can still use us in spite of the misplaced approaches and methods that we use? We know, however, that He can accomplish more through us according to how clear and biblical our message and our methods are. Given all that is at stake, we want to share the Good News as clearly as possible in a way that is pleasing to God, not just convenient to men.

We give the last word to the Bible: But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

- 1 Thessalonians 2:4 - Dr. Charlie Bing, GraceLife Ministries

*This article is excerpted and slightly adapted from an article entitled "How to Share the Gospel Clearly," which appeared in the Spring 1994 issue of the Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society. This portion of the article is taken from pp. 56-59, 65.

01.13. How To Share the Gospel Clearly - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1994

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing How To Share the Gospel Clearly - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1994

Synopsis: This is a practical guide to clear communication of the gospel. It covers motives for sharing the gospel, its content, and its condition, but most importantly, how to share those clearly.

Once, when I was invited to preach at an evangelistic rally in Dallas, the organizing pastor introduced me to a dear woman before the meeting. He had talked with her previously, but remained unsure whether she was saved or not. He left me alone with her, so I asked some "diagnostic" questions to find out for myself. I concluded that she did not really understand the Gospel, so I explained it to her as clearly as I could, then led her to place her faith in Christ. When we returned to the pastor to tell him the good news, she instead pointed her finger in his face and in an accusing voice rebuked him, "Why didn't you explain it clearly to me? You never made it clear!" (No evidential fruit of the Spirit at this point!) It is hard to say who was embarrassed more—or the pastor who had just graduated from seminary as a "Master of Theology!"

Academic credentials are no guarantee of clarity in communication. Sometimes it seems seminary degrees uniquely qualify a person to make a simple message confusing or complicated—anything but clear. One could even say that seminary grads become more obscure by degrees! Telling the Gospel clearly can be an exercise in art as much as in academics. Preachers and speakers of any kind are word artisans. A speaker shapes a message by the language and methods he uses. In Colossians 4:4 Paul asked for prayer to make his Gospel telling "manifest, as I ought to speak." The NASB and NIV translations prefer the word clear or clearly. F. F. Bruce translates it this way: "that I may publish it openly in the words which I ought to speak."¹ Paul understood that it was easy to garble the Gospel. He wanted to word it clearly. The word he used, phanerow, has the idea of "to make visible" and is from phainw which means "to manifest" or "to light up."² The job of the Gospel-teller is to shed light on the message, to make it clear, not to obscure it.

How important is it to tell the Gospel clearly? Well, we only need to think about what is at stake. Only in the Gospel is there the "power of God to salvation" (Romans 1:16). No wonder Paul had an "anathema" for those who misstate the message! The main assumption behind this article is this: God can use us to reach more people with a clear message than with a cloudy one. A clear presentation of the Gospel is not only more powerful, it also gets people off to a well-grounded start in their Christian walk. They will begin with a firm assurance and appreciation of their new salvation. Below are four essential elements that make for a clear Gospel witness.

I. A Clear Motive A compromise in integrity will likely tilt the telling of the Gospel. For example, one who is looking for bragging rights about his evangelistic prowess, or one who sweats his monthly field report on the number of conversions, may be tempted to take a shortcut with the Gospel message.

Once I was presenting the Gospel as clearly as I could to about twenty Cambodian refugees. At the end of our time, I invited all who would like to trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior to raise their hands. Everyone's hand went up! Though it would have made a good story, I never assumed this was a mass conversion. There were too many unknowns: The language barrier made me wonder if they understood my words. (I was speaking through a translator.) The religious barrier made me doubt they really understood concepts like sin and faith. (Most of them were Buddhist.) The cultural barrier made me wonder if they were not just being polite. (Asians are extremely polite, especially to teachers.) The social barrier had me wondering if they only wanted to please me because they saw me as a way to get something more in life (money, a job, etc.). The headlines in my newsletter, "A Miraculous Movement of the Spirit on Refugees," would have to wait.

How did the apostle Paul handle the temptation to take short cuts in sharing the Gospel for personal gain, or so that he could impress others, or get quick results? In 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 Paul states his approach to telling the Gospel, first negatively and then positively.

A. Negatively Speaking

Note Paul's negative terms first in 2 Corinthians 4:2. He renounces "the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully." He refuses to adopt questionable or shady practices which would bring shame if exposed. He would not use a convenient device or trick to achieve an end. He would not distort, dilute, compromise, adulterate, or falsify God's message. Paul would never manipulate or pressure people into a profession of faith. When I was an unchurched teenager, some friends and I went to an all-you-can-eat pizza bash at a local church. As we approached the church entrance, I asked an usher where we could find the pizza. He told us we would have to listen to the evangelist preach first. We looked at each other. Well, if that's what it took to get pizza, okay. We sat down and listened. At the end of his message, the evangelist asked all those who were not sure they were going to heaven to raise their hands. I raised my hand, but was determined to do nothing else. But he kept on, and before long we were all standing in place. Then, after we reached the point of no return (and imminent public embarrassment if we sat back down), he got us all to walk down the long church aisle to the front. We had been trapped like tuna in a net—but like dolphins, we didn't belong! At least we knew we would have the last laugh—we would get their pizza, even if it was a bit cold!

We may have made that evangelist look successful, and we may have been statistics in his newsletter, but I, for one, was not saved. Deceptive or even questionable tactics have no place in sharing the Good News.

Improper motives may muddy the message and methods of telling the Gospel. Below are some unacceptable practices that can grow from wrong motives.

1. Deceitful practices

Deceptive manipulation, such as I just illustrated, is unethical. No one should be tricked into hearing or responding to the Gospel. A minister friend told me how before he was saved he was invited to a luncheon to hear a well-known businessman speak, only to find that the man preached the Gospel. He was furious and had to sit on his hands during the car trip back to work so that he wouldn't deck his friend who invited him!

2. Dubious practices

Some methods Christians have adopted are not clearly deceptive, but questionable. Invitations to walk an aisle are not necessarily manipulative—it all depends on how the invitation is stated. A "Friend Day" at church can be a good activity for the church and your friends if they know what they are in for when they get there. By the way, could the door-to-door "surveys" conducted by Christians be more accurately named?

3. False promises

We must also be careful of making false promises of a trouble-free life for those who would trust in Christ. When people get saved, their marriage may not also be saved, their daughter may still want to get her nose pierced, and the IRS will still want their money. When I was in India recently, a pastor friend told me that with Hindus they do not use the promise of an improved family as a reason to become a Christian. The Hindu family is strong, and divorce is not a big problem. Besides, it is the Christians (who usually hold "Western" values) who have the weaker families in India. The pastor said that their appeal in telling the Gospel is the promise of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. How novel!

4. Sensual appeal The Children of God cult used to urge their followers to proselytize through "Flirty Fishing." Attractive young ladies would lure naive young men to their religious meetings with the impression that punch and cookies was not the main dish afterward. This is an extreme example of a sensual method. But is it so very different from luring people to Christ through the hope of finding a Christian husband or wife, or the promise of financial prosperity or physical healing?

Jesus could get a crowd by handing out free fish sandwiches, but He later chased them away by telling them, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life" (John 6:27). Missionaries warn of "Rice Christians," those who profess conversion in hopes of obtaining more of the missionaries' supplies.

5. Trivialized pursuits A free dinner for two awarded to the visitation team with the most conversions will likely compromise the message or the methods they use. One friend, who used to be with a para-church organization, told how the pressure to share the Gospel with others was so great he often only shared a brief watered-down word so that he could list the person on his statistics sheet. Once he witnessed to a potted plant and recorded "her" as "Fern"!

I am aware that Gospel blimps and placards with "John 3:16" at football games may have a place in God's big world. I also remind myself of evangelist D. L. Moody's words to someone who criticized his methods of evangelism. He told him, "I like the way I'm doing it better than the way you're not doing it!" But I question the effectiveness of methods that handle the Good News flippantly. The Gospel deserves more than a game-show approach if others are to take us and it seriously.

B. Positively Speaking

Paul disdains all unworthy tactics. Instead, in 2 Corinthians 4:2 he states positively that he preaches "by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." The word "manifestation" is our word *phanerow* again. Paul preached clearly,

openly, and honestly even when discouraging circumstances tempted him to get fast results. The result of his ministry was that "every man's conscience"—whether saved or unsaved—commended him for his honesty, and more importantly, so did God.

I once overheard two seminary students discussing a Scripture passage. One said, "I don't think that's what the passage is saying." The other replied, "Yeah, but it'll preach!" Our standards must be higher than "It'll preach." We must only say what God says and in the way He would say it. In a ministry of light, there is no room for darkness. Paul reminds us that a dark, demonic veil blinds unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). It is penetrated only by "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." Dark motives and methods cannot penetrate or disperse the darkness. That is why Paul says "we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5). His preaching did not call attention to himself, like the "super apostles" who were subverting his reputation in Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:5). He lifted up Jesus Christ as the One who died for sins, rose from the dead, and now reigns as Lord.

It is significant that Paul uses the word *khryssh* for "preach." In the ancient world, one who proclaimed in this sense was called a *khryx*, or "herald." A herald was someone sent by his master to proclaim in public the master's message. He dared not change the announcement because it was not his own. His responsibility was only to proclaim it accurately. That is how Paul understood his Gospel ministry. He was merely a servant proclaiming his Master's Good News. The herald should be lost in his message. Only the Gospel of light dispels darkness and brings new life. That's how Paul got saved (2 Corinthians 4:6), and that's how we get saved. The acid test of a true witness is what he does when no one responds. It is a test of integrity. Skewed motives will skew integrity by a compromise in the message or the methods of telling the Good News. At the end of my meeting with the Cambodian group, I left them with an assurance of my love and my desire to see them come to know the Lord Jesus as their Savior. Their last words to me came through the translator in his rough English: "They say, `Thank you for advertising Jesus Christ to us.'" I doubt that any of those people even remember my name today, but I trust some of them know Jesus Christ. We advertise Him.

It is a great privilege to be a herald of the Gospel. But we must remember that the greatest thing about preaching the Gospel is the Gospel, not the preacher!

II. A Clear Content

What does a person have to believe in to be saved? I have heard everything from "Believe in God" and "the Ten Commandments" (or "the Sermon on the Mount") to "Just believe that Jesus loves you." What is the content of the Gospel and how can we articulate it clearly?

A. Defining the Content

Most of our readers should not need a review of the Gospel's content. It is laid out no more clearly than by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58. Paul reminds the Corinthians about the Gospel that he preached, that they received, and by which they were saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). The message was the one Paul received personally from God (1 Corinthians 15:3; cf. Galatians 1:11-12). In 1 Corinthians 15:4-5 we find two great propositions of the Gospel and their supporting evidence. We could diagram the verses like this:

Christ died for our sins 1) First proposition according to the Scriptures 1a) Scriptural proof and was buried 1b) Physical proof He arose 2) Second proposition according to the Scriptures 2a) Scriptural proof and was seen 2b) Physical proof In summoning the evidence for his propositions, Paul is arguing his case like any good lawyer (the possible oxymoron noted!). A brief explanation of each of the statements follows:

Christ died for our sins. The concept of "Christ" may not have been entirely understood by the Corinthian readers, but the meaning of "anointed" and His work of dying for sins certainly points to a special divine messenger. That He died for our sins implies that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. The word "for" (hyper) conveys the idea of "on account of," i.e., to deal with our sins.

According to the Scriptures. The OT Scriptures pictured or predicted the suffering of God's Messiah (e.g., Exodus 12:1-51; Leviticus 16:1-34; Psalms 22:1-31, Psalms 100:1-7; Isaiah 52:1-15, Isaiah 53:1-12, Isaiah 54:1-17, Isaiah 55:1-13, especially Isaiah 53:4-6). And was buried. This statement functions as Jesus' death certificate. It reminds the reader of the many eye-witnesses to His death, the best evidence which could be summoned. Only dead men are buried. Christ's death was witnessed by multitudes, including the soldier sent to break His legs. The grave and body were also attended by Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the women.

He arose. The second proposition attests to Christ's resurrection from the dead, which implies that God accepted the sacrifice. A dead man cannot save anyone. A Savior has to be alive. Only then can He offer and effect salvation. According to the Scriptures. It is harder to find the resurrection of Christ in the OT. However it is there not only explicitly (Eg., Psalms 16:8-11; Psalms 110:1), but also implicitly. When the suffering and death of the Messiah is discussed, this is often followed by a declaration of His reign (cf Isaiah 53:1-12). The implication is clearly that He rose from the dead. And was seen. Paul lists those who were eye-witnesses. This included the apostles (men of repute), a multitude of five hundred, and himself (vv 5-8).

B. Communicating the Content

Having reviewed the biblical content of the Gospel, what errors do Christians commonly make in articulating its contents? The art here is discerning how much to say. We can say too little or too much.

1. Saying too little

People can be told that God loves them, but certainly that is not enough to save them. They can be convinced they are terrible sinners, but still not know how to deal with that sin (cf. Acts 2:36-37). A persuasive speaker can move people to some kind of response without them knowing exactly what they are responding to. Evangelists know this. Some abuse this. Much so-called "evangelism" is more hype than substance. No wonder there are so many false professors in the church! They are the fodder that feeds the Lordship Salvation teaching.

2. Saying too much A witness is not the time to dump our "smarties" on a bewildered unbeliever. There are at least two ways Christians frequently do this. A Bible survey. Too often we try to give too much biblical data. If we start in Genesis, there's a good chance we will lose our audience by Leviticus, the Bermuda Triangle of the Bible. How much Bible did Jesus use with the woman at the well (John 4:1-54), or Paul with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:1-40)? We can tell people only what

they need to know from the Bible to be saved, unless circumstances require more explanation.³ A crash course in Theology 101. I recently asked a missionary candidate with seminary training to tell me how he explains the Gospel to someone. I expected a brief outline of his main points. Instead, he took a deep breath and submerged into profound meditation for a good part of a minute. When he surfaced, he began a deep theological explanation of the sinfulness of man. I interrupted him, because I feel I have endured my share of theology lectures.

Lessons in theology work best with Christians. That is why Paul wrote the heavily theological Epistle to the Romans to Christians. But in 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 he reminds the readers of what he preached to them as non-Christians. Secular Sam does not need to know the definition of justification in order to be justified. He does not need to understand the Abrahamic covenant to become a son of Abraham. Neither does he need to comprehend the *ordo salutis* to be saved in that order. Melchizedek will be a fascinating study for Sam—after he is saved.

Again, we appeal to Jesus' example in the Gospels. Isn't it beautiful that God made the Gospel so simple that a child can understand it? Yet it is so simple that millions miss it. Still, keep it simple!

III. A Clear Condition

Just when I had talked myself into the benefit of becoming involved with my community's ministerial alliance, they decided to launch a community-wide evangelistic survey. A smorgasbord subcommittee of pastors designed the evangelistic tract that would be handed out door to door. To be thorough, I guess, the tract covered all the bases. It spoke of believing in Jesus as Savior (Amen!), but went on to tell the poor chap at the door (who was probably dying to get back to his television ASAP) that he must confess his sins, call on the name of the Lord, open the door of his heart, receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, and let Him take control of the throne of his life. It's not that all of this language is unbiblical (though most of it is), but it is so confusing. Since the alliance would not let our church use different literature, I had to drop out of my first foray into cooperative evangelism. The reverends were miffed. Maybe I will check in on them again in a year or so when they calm down.

We will save ink by affirming to our readers that the only condition of salvation is "faith alone in Christ alone." But this is where much Gospel telling takes a space-walk. Let's review some language commonly used to explain the condition of salvation.

Ask Jesus into your heart. Not that the heart is not universally understood as the very essence of our being and person. But the issue of trust in Jesus as the One who died in our place is hardly communicated. And wouldn't this be confusing to a child who thinks concretely instead of abstractly? As a mother drove with her young daughter in the car, she was explaining what it meant to have Jesus in her heart. The little girl leaned over and put her ear to her mother's chest. "I'm listening to Jesus in your heart," said the daughter. "What did you hear?" asked Mom. The little girl replied, "Sounds like He's making coffee to me!"⁴

Give your heart (or life) to God. A Halloween Gospel tract designed for children to leave at homes when Trick or Treating ends, "Well, thanks again for the treat, but the best treat for me would be for you to give your heart to Jesus."⁵ How appropriate this could be for Halloween! A child might imagine this as a gruesome display for the local haunted house. Again, picture the scene conveyed to a naive child. When asked to give his heart to God, one child broke into sobs saying,

"If I give my heart to God, how am I going to live?"⁶ The issue in salvation is not what we give to Him anyway, but what He gives to us. Eternal life is Christ's life in us (1 John 5:11).

Invite Christ into your life. This is certainly a courteous approach, but we must remember that it is the Lord who does the inviting. Another form of this is the admonition to "open the door of your heart," based on Revelation 3:20. Though I used to use this verse a lot, I now see that it was written to the Laodicean church as a whole and was more of an invitation for fellowship than salvation. Again, after you get a child to stop wondering where the knob on the door of his heart is, you have really told him nothing about what it means to believe in Christ. Adults are not helped either.

Receive Christ as your Savior. This one I hesitate to criticize, and even find myself using it sometimes, though I try to avoid it. There is some biblical support for the idea of receiving Christ—John 1:11-12 and Colossians 2:6. Both uses are in the past tense, pointing to the result of faith, however. Receiving Christ is what happens when we believe and He comes to live in us.⁷ Accept Christ is similar, but not used for faith in Christ in the NT.

Make Christ Lord and Savior. Spare the effort. No person can do this. The Bible says God the Father "has made this Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Of course Jesus is Lord! But He is Lord whether we accept Him as such or not.

Make Christ Lord of your life. This is Lordship Salvation when used as a condition for salvation. Lordship decisions are decisions for Christian obedience made by believers in the light of transforming grace (Titus 2:11-12), not something done to merit that grace (Titus 3:4-7). Sometimes we hear "If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all." Would somebody please tell me what this saying means?

Put Jesus on the throne of your life. In other words, give Him control of all areas of your life. Has anyone accomplished this? It is a commendable admonition for a believer, but again teaches Lordship Salvation if it is made a condition for salvation. It is better to deal with this issue after a person understands the issue of faith in Christ for salvation. I know, however, that some people believe in Christ as Savior and surrender to Him as Lord simultaneously. They inherently understand that if Christ saves us, He also deserves to rule us and both decisions appear as one. Still, the issues are distinct.

Confess your sins. To a priest? How many sins? What about ones that are overlooked, forgotten, unintentional, or by omission? This is confusing. Of course, we must all acknowledge that we are sinners before God, and we confess this to Him when we agree with Him that we are.⁸ We are saved from something, and that is our sin. But the above statement implies our problem is specific individual acts rather than our sinful position or nature. God wants to cure the cause, not the symptoms.

Repent of your sins. Sometimes less sensitively stated as "Turn or burn!" If by this it is meant that we must turn from every individual sin in our lives, then salvation and assurance would be impossible. Repentance in the NT speaks of an inner change of attitude and heart, not an outer change in conduct. Changed conduct is the expected result of true repentance, but we should not confuse the root with the fruit. As we come to faith we may change our minds about a number of things, for example, our sinful status before God, our need for salvation, or our opinion of who

Christ is.

Pray this prayer. I have a pamphlet entitled "God's Anointed Soul-Winning Plan" in which the author is explaining how to present the Gospel. The wording he suggests ends like this:

What I'm going to do toward closing our talk is to say a prayer. And as I say this prayer you can repeat it softly and He'll come into your heart—but you have to REALLY MEAN it or the prayer won't work.

Before we pray the prayer I want to say this, this prayer we are about to pray is a special prayer. Do you need to pray this prayer EVERY DAY to go to heaven, or just ONCE to go to heaven? (emphasis his).⁹ I am not making this up. Believe me, you don't want to see the prayer.

We should not give someone the impression that they can be saved by a ritual such as prayer. It is better to tell them that they must believe in Christ, and they can tell Him through prayer that they want the gift of eternal life or that they are thankful for what He has done. Not all of the above conditions are totally void of all truth. The point is that they are often misleading or confusing. Why not be as biblical as possible in our communication of the condition for salvation? In the Gospel of John the verb believe is used ninety-eight times as the condition for salvation. We should take the hint, especially when the Holy Spirit had John tip us off that he wrote his book in order to bring people to faith in Christ (John 20:31). We don't find any of the above language there.¹⁰ IV. A Clear Invitation A minister acquaintance told me an almost humorous story of his conversion. When he was a totally pagan, long-haired bartender and bouncer, he attended a revival and went forward at the evangelist's invitation. When he got to the front, the host pastor met him and asked, "Do you come to make a profession of faith in Christ?" Bill looked confused. The pastor asked several times. Bill finally said, "Look, I don't know what you're talking about. I just want Jesus." He told me if it had not been for the evangelist's clarity in the sermon, he would not have found Christ up front with the pastor. As one of my seminary professors, Howard Hendricks, was fond of saying, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew." A clear telling of the Gospel can easily become unclear when the invitation is given. Whether it is an invitation in a one-on-one encounter or a public invitation by a preacher, there are certain things that will keep it clear. Let's look at some of the common invitations and comment on each.

Come forward. The invitation to come down the church aisle is used by many preachers, though criticized by others—sometimes rightly so.¹¹ It has only been around since the 1800's. Some people will quickly respond to such a public expression, and others would rather go through an IRS audit before they would stand up in front of a crowd. In spite of 18 verses of "Just As I Am," they are singing to themselves, "I Shall Not Be Moved"!

Walking the aisle is not harmful if the person clearly understands the issue. We probably all know someone who came to faith in this way. But people should never be led to believe that they must walk an aisle in order to be saved—even if the preacher's ego is at stake. They should be encouraged to walk an aisle if they want to talk to someone about their salvation or if they want to make a public statement that they have trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior during the meeting.

Bow your heads and close your eyes. (Not, Close your heads and bow your eyes, as one hapless preacher stated it!). Why must Christians always get saved with their eyes closed? In a seance opening the eyes might break the spell, but in a Gospel confrontation faith can appear with eyes

wide open. Funny, but Jesus was always opening peoples' eyes! On the serious side, closed eyes and bowed heads can create a safe, confidential, and prayerful environment for those who may want to respond publicly.

Raise your hand. Again, we must avoid implying that a physical act is necessary. However, raising a hand is less threatening to a person than walking an aisle. It may give the preacher more opportunity to identify those who are interested in salvation. In fact, I ask people to raise their hands in my invitation, because I want to follow-up with them. I will often tell them something like this:

You don't have to bow your head or raise your hand to be saved. You can believe in Jesus Christ with your eyes wide open while you are looking at me. I would just like to know that you have placed your faith in Christ as your Savior or that you want to know more about that. The only way I can know who you are, so I can speak with you later in private, is if you raise your hand. I really would like to talk to you about it.

Sign a card. This is also non-threatening to many people, even though a few may have fearful visions of a three-person Evangelism Explosion team ambling up their sidewalk later in the week. It is often wise to ask this only if all the people present at the meeting fill out cards. This makes people feel less conspicuous. A card could include these categories to check:

I have trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior today.

I want more information about knowing Jesus Christ as Savior.

I want to know for certain that I have eternal life.

I want to speak to someone about my salvation.

Pray a prayer. An invitation involving prayer can be handled correctly. The Gospel teller must be careful to make the issue faith. When inviting people to Christ, I explain how it is that Christ saves us through faith, make sure they understand the issues, then ask, "Do you believe this?" If they say "Yes," I say, "Then why don't you thank Him right now in prayer for dying for you and for giving you eternal life?"

It may not be possible to validate a public invitation from the Scriptures. But then we could not validate Gospel tracts and evangelism training classes either. Sharing the Good News implies an invitation to believe, and giving a clear invitation may help many to actually do it. The main point in relation to the invitation is that in no way do we want a person to get faith mixed up with works. If we have told someone that salvation is a free gift, then we must be consistent and not demand any action as a condition. In fact, when someone decides to respond to any kind of invitation, it seems logical that he or she is already trusting in Christ and just desires to express it somehow. An invitation gives people an opportunity to tell others about their faith, something they should be doing the rest of their lives. Such an expression can help affirm them in their faith.

Conclusion

Clear communication is an art. When it comes to telling the Gospel it is an art worth refining. We must work to tell the Gospel as clearly as possible. Not always will we succeed. But isn't it a

wonderful fact of life that God can still use us in spite of the misplaced approaches and methods that we use? We know, however, that He can accomplish more through us according to how clear and biblical our message and our methods are. And that means that we are clear in our motives, in our Gospel content, in our statement of the condition for salvation, and in our invitation to believe. Given all that is at stake, we want to share the Good News as clearly as possible in a way that is pleasing to God, not just convenient to men.

We give the last word to the Bible: But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

1 Thessalonians 2:4.

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Endnotes

1 F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians and Colossians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 298.

2 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged in one volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 1244-45.

3 Having said all that, we state an important caveat: It does no good to talk about concepts like sin unless our audience has an idea of what it means. We must be careful not to assume too much biblical background for our audience. Paul started his witness with creation in Athens (Acts 17:1-34). When in a remote African fishing village, I also found it necessary to begin my witness with the account of creation and the fall of man. Our society is growing increasingly secular and will need more and more explanation, but usually we give too much anyway.

4 James Dobson told this story on his March 1, 1994 broadcast.

5 "Thanks for the Treat," Faith, Prayer, & Tract League (Grand Rapids).

6 Larry Moyer, "Guiding Children to Trust Christ," *Moody Monthly*, December 1987, 42.

7 Note how the immediate context of each passage refers to faith as the condition of salvation.

8 The word translated "confess" is *homologew* which means "to speak the same thing," thus "to agree with (some person with reference to something)". See Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1944-55), 1:177-78.

9 Larry Beckmann, "God's Anointed Soul-Winning Plan," Baldwin Park, CA: n.p. 1982.

10 Except, as noted above, the mention of receiving Christ in 1:11-12.

11 See my review of Jim Ehrhard's article in the periodical review section of this issue.

01.14. The Cost of Discipleship - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1993

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing The Cost of Discipleship - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1993

Synopsis:

Eternal salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. The conditions for discipleship are explained. The Cost of Discipleship

Discipleship is costly. The Scriptures are clear that to be a disciple in the fullest sense of the term means that a person must pay a price. There is no view of discipleship which would disagree with this conclusion. However, the disagreement comes over whether the conditions for costly discipleship are also conditions for salvation. This critical difference is the subject of this third and last article in my series on discipleship.

I. The Issue

If the conditions of discipleship are also conditions of salvation, then every Christian is, by definition, a disciple, and salvation, by definition, is costly. If these conditions are not conditions for salvation, then the issue of discipleship must be distinguished from the issue of salvation so that discipleship is truly costly and salvation, truly free. We will now survey the two opposing views.

A. The "Costly Grace" View The view that salvation is costly received its modern impetus from the German theologian and activist Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who expressed his views in the book *The Cost of Discipleship*, first published in English in 1949. He wrote of "costly grace" as opposed to "cheap grace," which he described as "Grace without price; grace without cost," or "grace without discipleship."¹ To him, costly grace is inseparable from discipleship: The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who left all to follow Christ. Such a man knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from grace.²

Bonhoeffer's concept of "costly grace" has appealed to many who think it is the answer to the apathy and worldliness of contemporary Christians. The proponents of Lordship Salvation have naturally taken interest in costly discipleship as a solution to the growing number of people who profess to be Christians but who do not live up to their profession. Poe states, "The concern for discipleship did not emerge as a theoretical concept in an academic setting, rather it resulted from the phenomenon of people claiming to be Christians who have no interest in the things of Christ."³ Lordship proponents solve this problem by demanding that sinners pay a price for their salvation, the price of submission and obedience. J. I. Packer's statement exemplifies the Lordship position: In our own presentation of Christ's gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and make sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness. In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything.⁴ In their thinking, the cost of salvation includes the many conditions laid

down by Christ for becoming a disciple, since in their opinion, salvation and discipleship are one and the same.⁵

Though Lordship proponents have no reservations about calling salvation costly, they maintain adamantly that salvation is not of works, but a free gift. The "costly but free" contradiction is explained as a theological "paradox."⁶ B. The "Free Grace" View

It is difficult for those who oppose the concept of "costly grace" to understand how its proponents do not teach works salvation, or at the least, how they are not engaging in theological double-talk. Though labeled a position of "cheap grace" by Lordship Salvation teachers, we prefer to call our position more accurately Free Grace because it emphasizes the freeness of salvation and the simplicity of faith.⁷ The Free Grace position holds that salvation and discipleship are separate issues. Salvation concerns the sinner's acceptance of the free gift of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins through faith alone. Discipleship concerns the believer's response to the grace received by offering himself to God in submission, obedience, and sacrifice. In salvation, Christ paid the price; in discipleship, the believer pays the price. Therefore, salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. Because they are separate issues, there is no contradiction. In the previous articles of this series, we have defended the Free Grace view that discipleship is separate from salvation.⁸ This was done by studying the terms for discipleship in the NT and by showing that the call to salvation is not the same as the call to discipleship. This article will study the conditions for becoming a disciple in the Gospels and will show that they cannot be conditions for salvation.

II. The Conditions of Discipleship The teachings of Jesus Christ make it plain that discipleship is costly. The matter to be determined is whether the passages which specify the cost of discipleship speak of the requirements for salvation or of a post-salvation commitment to our Lord. The basic conditions of discipleship were given by Christ after Peter's well-known confession and Christ's prediction of His death and resurrection and the story of His transfiguration. The focus of this section will be largely upon the parallel passages Matthew 16:24-27, Mark 8:34-38, and Luke 9:23-26. Other conditions discussed are those found in Matthew 10:37//Luke 14:26; Luke 14:33; and John 8:30-31.

A. The Conditions at Peter's Confession Matthew 16:24-27//Mark 8:34-38//Luke 9:23-26

Before the conditions themselves are studied, a consideration of their context will be valuable. The occasion and audience will help determine the purposes of Jesus' hard sayings about discipleship.

1. The Background The Lordship interpretation of Jesus' teaching about discipleship assumes an evangelistic occasion.⁹ The context shows that the occasion of these sayings is significantly linked to the prediction of Christ's passion and resurrection and His rebuke of Peter. Matthew and Mark's account record Peter's rebuke of Christ and Christ's response: "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23//Mark 8:33).

Jesus' rebuke demonstrates to the disciples that He must suffer and be killed as part of God's will for Him (Matthew 16:21//Mark 8:31//Luke 9:22). There was, for Christ, a price to be paid in following God's will to completion and His own glorification. Peter's rebuke of Christ essentially denies that God's will requires such a price. Jesus' subsequent rebuke categorizes this perspective as satanic. The conditions of discipleship then follow contextually ("Then" [Tote],

Matthew 16:24) as the price which must be paid to follow the will of God to completion and share in Christ's glory.¹⁰ In view of the Lord's imminent death, departure, and glorification,¹¹ these conditions show the way by which the will of God can be fully realized in Christ's absence. The audience is also significant. Matthew indicates that Jesus addressed His sayings to none other than the twelve disciples (Matthew 16:24). Mark says that Jesus "called the people (ochlos) to Him, with His disciples also" (Mark 8:34). The crowd is not specifically identified, but in Mark's use of ochlos, when there is enough evidence to determine their disposition, the crowd with Jesus is presented as at least curious enough to follow Him. More often, they are characterized as enthusiastic followers, teachable, exhibiting faith in their midst, and sometimes seeming totally sympathetic to Christ as if they were believers.¹² Luke records that Jesus spoke "to them all" (Luke 9:23), the nearest antecedent of which is the Twelve (Luke 9:18),¹³ but possibly He spoke to the Twelve and the multitudes.¹⁴ In Luke 12:1 Jesus is described as teaching His disciples "first" in the presence of an "innumerable multitude." It is therefore reasonable to assume that in the Synoptics, when Jesus spoke to the multitudes (who to various degrees were followers), He was first teaching His twelve disciples, and secondarily His other followers.

If Jesus addressed primarily His twelve disciples, who (except for Judas¹⁵) were definitely saved, and the crowds who were at least sympathetic or at most contained many followers whose exact commitment to Christ is left undefined, then it is reasonable to assume these sayings should apply to the issues of a deeper relationship with Him and not to salvation. It would be pointless for the Synoptic authors (especially Matthew) to focus on the disciples if these were conditions of salvation.¹⁶ We would expect such conditions to be announced when the disciples first met Jesus. A brief examination of each of these conditions will demonstrate whether they apply more appropriately to the Christian life or to salvation.

2. The Conditions The conditions must be interpreted in light of the preceding prediction of Jesus' suffering and death. As it cost Jesus to follow the Father's will, so it would cost His disciples to do the same. As we shall see, sometimes there is agreement about the substance of the condition on the part of Lordship and Free Grace expositors. But the focus of the debate is on whether these are conditions for salvation or for a deeper commitment of discipleship.

Also, it should be noted that the requirements are for anyone who desires to "come after" Christ (Matthew 16:24//Mark 8:34//Luke 9:23). As noted in previous articles, "come after" (opiso elthein) denotes discipleship. It clearly describes a process, not an event; a committed life of following after Jesus rather than coming to (proselthein) Him for salvation.¹⁷ The conditions for those who would "come after" Christ will be considered individually, then collectively.

"Deny himself" This is best interpreted by what the disciples have just heard about Christ's fate. Jesus was about to submit Himself and His own desires to the desire of the Father for Him, which was suffering and death. To deny oneself refers contextually to being mindful of the things of God, not the things of man (Matthew 16:23//Mark 8:33). In Stott's understanding, one "must repudiate himself and his right to organize his own life."¹⁸ Gentry argues the significance in relation to salvation: "A person who truly receives Christ as Savior is in effect denying himself and his wants as nothing and Christ as everything."¹⁹

While Stott and Gentry understand the substance of the saying, their application of this condition to salvation does not coincide with the real issue in salvation, which is the forgiveness of sin and

justification of the sinner. But in harmony with the context, Jesus is not addressing these issues here. He speaks of denying oneself that which would obstruct the fulfillment of God's will in the course of following Him. In the passages that deal unquestionably with eternal salvation, there is no mention of self-denial, or one's "right to organize his own life," or one's "denying himself his wants" as a requirement for salvation.

"Take up his cross." Stott argues that to take up the cross is to make oneself as a condemned man, apparently in the sense of living for Christ instead of self.²⁰ Boice sees cross-bearing as "saying yes to something for Jesus' sake." Specifically, Boice declares that cross-bearing involves prayer, Bible study, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, receiving strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners, and witnessing.²¹ In light of the context, it appears that Jesus is expecting the disciples to suffer hardships in order to do God's will just as He does by submitting to the Cross. For Him and for the disciples, it meant they were like men condemned to die, who carry their cross-beams to the place of execution in submission to a higher authority.²² If this is applied to unbelievers, then the Gospel message is a demand to be willing to die for Jesus.

Stott's interpretation and Gentry's practical considerations may be correct, but that they refer to a condition of salvation for unbelievers is untenable, for then salvation would be by suffering, by a willingness to die for Christ, and thus by works, as Boice's particulars demonstrate. This contradicts the Scriptures which speak of the necessity of Jesus Christ suffering so that sinners could be saved apart from works.²³ The sinner's willingness to suffer is not a condition of justification. Also, the unbeliever has no cross in the sense of self-mortification (contra Stott), for he is already dead in sins (Ephesians 2:1-2); nor do unbelievers, by definition, have a cross in the sense of Christian duties (contra Boice).

Furthermore, Luke adds the qualifier "daily," which shows this could not refer to salvation because it refers to something that is done repeatedly. Stott is right when he declares, "Every day the Christian is to die. Every day he renounces the sovereignty of his own will. Every day he renews his unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ."²⁴ But Stott speaks here of "the Christian."²⁵ If this characterizes saving faith and is a condition for salvation, as Lordship proponents insist, one must repeatedly place his faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord through daily surrender. In other words, salvation would not occur at a point in time. Such a condition is not found elsewhere in the Bible and makes both salvation and assurance impossible.

"Follow Me." As discussed in both previous articles, this phrase speaks of discipleship and denotes the pupil/master relationship. Here Jesus invests the term with the significance of following Him by obeying God's will, that is, by self-denial and taking up the cross, as Stott agrees.²⁶ Because following another person is a process, a progression, and requires time, this condition cannot speak of entrance into salvation. This would promote salvation by the imitation of Christ or by adherence to His example, which would be a salvation of works. It is best taken as a term that describes a continuously committed lifestyle.

"Loses his life." An explanatory statement ("For") follows the three conditions. Jesus says, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (Luke 9:24; cf. Matthew 16:25//Mark 8:35; and Matthew 10:39). To lose one's life explains in summary form what it means to deny oneself, take up one's cross, and follow Jesus Christ in submission to God's will. The background of Jesus losing His life physically (on the Cross) and thus

metaphorically (to the will of God) has been observed in the previous context (Matthew 16:21//Mark 8:31//Luke 9:22). Therefore, those who are to be disciples must also lose their lives to the will of God. This will involve the three conditions just mentioned: denial of one's own desires, suffering in obedience, and continuous following of Christ in the will of God. The denial of one's own desires in order to obey the will of God is amplified by the following rhetorical question: "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26; cf. Mark 8:36//Luke 9:25). If a man chose not to deny himself and not to pursue the will of God, but to pursue his own selfish and worldly desires, he would lose his soul (i.e., his life).

Here some point to the phrase "save his life" and "loses his own soul," and the consequence "destroyed" or "lost" (in Luke) to say that the passage speaks of eternal salvation.²⁷ However, the verb save (sozo) often does not refer to eternal salvation. It is probably used here in the general sense of "rescue, preserve from danger"²⁸ or "deliver,"²⁹ i.e., save from a life of self-denial and cross-bearing,³⁰ for this thought explains ("For," gar) the impact of the previous conditions.

Likewise, "life" (psyche) does not automatically refer to the eternal soul only. The parallel in Luke 9:25 replaces Matthew and Mark's "life" with "himself" (heauton). The noun psyche is frequently used in Scripture in the sense of the essential life of man. Contrary to other Lordship proponents, Stott recognizes this meaning. Speaking of the word psyche he correctly observes, The word for "life" here means neither our physical existence, nor our soul, but our self. The psyche is the ego, the human personality which thinks, feels, plans and chooses... The man who commits himself to Christ, therefore, loses himself, not by the absorption of his personality in Christ's personality but by the submission of his will to Christ's will.³¹

Furthermore, unless the context is clearly proved to be soteriological, the verbs "destroyed" (apollymi in Matthew) and "lost" (zemioo, in Matthew and Luke) should retain their respective general meanings of "ruin, destroy, lose"³² and "suffer damage or loss, forfeit, sustain injury."³³ When Jesus says "whoever loses his life for My sake," the sense is certainly not eternal destruction, for He says this one will then "find it," which is something good. Conversely, it fits well that what one may lose when he tries to save his life (preserve himself from the hardships of self-denial and cross-bearing) is life in the essential qualitative sense (i.e., experiencing God's life in this life, John 17:3), not the eternal soul. The paradox Jesus used has great meaning. What He appears to be saying is this: "Whoever desires to preserve himself from the hardships of God's will of self-denial and cross-bearing will in fact forfeit the essential quality (= true spiritual value) of the present life he is trying to preserve. On the other hand, whoever forfeits himself to God's will of self-denial and hardships will discover the greater essential quality (spiritual value) of the present life he was willing to forfeit." This interpretation would therefore not describe eternal salvation, but a higher quality of experience with God in this life, with implications for the eschatological life, as the next section will show.

"Whoever is ashamed of Me." Mark and Luke state a negative condition that if anyone is ashamed of Christ and His words, Christ will also be ashamed of that person at His coming (Mark 8:38//Luke 9:26). Matthew 16:27 does not mention shame, but can be correlated with Matthew 10:32-34 where the condition is stated in terms of confessing and denying Christ,³⁵ and is claimed to be a condition of salvation by Lordship teachers.³⁶ The idea of being ashamed of Christ or denying

Christ is clarified in some contexts more than in others. In Luke this saying follows a warning about one who positions himself with the world for the sake of gain (Luke 9:25). It thus explains ("For," gar) the eschatological consequences which face those who desire the world. The same could be said of this saying in Mark 8:38, with the exception that Jesus adds the helpful phrase "in this adulterous and sinful generation." The shame therefore seems to imply a denial of one's identification with Christ in the face of the pressure to live for and identify with the world. In Mark the "For" appears to connect Mark 8:38 with Mark 8:35, expanding the idea of one's relation to this world and its consequences.

Perhaps the greatest clarification comes from the parallel thought of Matthew 10:32-33, where the context is developed more fully. There Jesus is giving instructions to the Twelve before sending them out to preach the Gospel (Matthew 10:5 ff.). He warns of rejection and persecution (Matthew 10:16-25) and encourages them not to fear (Matthew 10:26-31). Matthew 10:32-33 are also followed by similar warnings about rejection (Matthew 10:34-36). In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus is both encouraging and warning in the face of the fear of persecution. He wants the disciples to know that anyone who identifies with Him will be rewarded, while anyone who shrinks from this will be denied by Christ before the Father (explained below). Matthew's context seems a close parallel to that which is signified by Mark's phrase "in this adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38). The consequence facing someone who is ashamed of or denies Christ is more enigmatic. Does Christ's reciprocal shame and denial of that person at His coming denote a denial of salvation? In correlating Matthew 10:32-33 with Matthew 16:27, it is clear that the issue is some kind of recompense for one's works. Matthew takes care to state that at His coming, Christ "will reward (apodosei) each according to his works" (Matthew 16:27). That Jesus makes works the basis of the recompense demands that salvation not be the issue (Ephesians 2:8-9). Also, the verb apodosei carries the idea of "recompense" with no inherent sense of whether it is good or bad, so it could speak of positive reward or negative judgment.³⁷ In Mark and Luke a negative recompense is suggested: Those who were too ashamed to identify with Christ will experience Christ's shame. The effect of Christ's shame is not specified, but one could surmise that for a redeemed and now fully-enlightened believer, this would at least produce agonizing regret. In the parallel passage, Matthew 10:32-33, the idea of recompense is good (Matthew 10:32) or bad (Matthew 10:33) accordingly.³⁸ Christ's confession (or lack of it) in heaven would not relate to the judgment of our salvation, but to an acknowledgment (or lack of it) before the Father of the disciples' unity or fellowship with Christ³⁹ which is recompensed in an unspecified but appropriate way. (However, one might compare 2 Timothy 2:12, where reigning with Christ is the specific reward.)

3. The Conclusions from These Conditions

Collectively, all the conditions studied thus far in this section are summarized by Lordship advocates as demands for submission to Christ as Lord for salvation. Stott summarizes them under the concept of following Christ:

Thus, in order to follow Christ, we have to deny ourselves, to crucify ourselves, to lose ourselves. The full inexorable demand of Jesus Christ is now laid bare. He does not call us to a sloppy half-heartedness, but to a vigorous, absolute commitment. He invites us to make Him our Lord.⁴⁰ Likewise, MacArthur concludes,

Faith is not an experiment, but a lifelong commitment. It means taking up the cross daily, giving all for Christ each day with no reservations, no uncertainty, no hesitation. It means nothing is knowingly held back, nothing purposely shielded from His lordship, nothing stubbornly kept from His control.⁴¹

Plainly, the conditions understood by Lordship advocates are absolute, all or nothing.⁴² In essence, there is little disagreement with the interpretations of the demands themselves, only with the application of them to salvation instead of the Christian life.

Lordship Salvation teachers will object to the charge that applying these conditions to unbelievers is works oriented. But their interpretation of the conditions cannot evade the charge of salvation by merit. It makes no sense to demand from unbelieving sinners a decision that assumes an understanding of the full significance of Christ's sacrifice, especially at this point in the Gospel narratives before His death. (Would Jesus ask an unbeliever to be willing to die for Him?) This would practically preclude anyone from being saved unless he understood the meanings of these conditions—meanings which can best be appreciated in light of salvation, not in prospect of it.

Jesus' teaching on discipleship took place well into His ministry and was addressed primarily to His disciples as a further revelation of the kind of commitment He desired of His already saved followers. He explained these conditions against the background of His own commitment that would lead to His death in order to invest them with the fullest significance for those who also desired to follow God's will.

B. Other Conditions

Some other conditions will be considered briefly. Again, the main issue is not usually the interpretation of the condition itself, but whether it applies to Christians or non-Christians.

1. Hate Your Family (Matthew 10:37//Luke 14:26) In another setting, Matthew and Luke add another condition to those already considered. In Matthew's account, Jesus says the one who "loves" family more than Him is "not worthy" of Him. In Luke, Jesus says no one can be His disciple who does not "hate" his family and his own life. This condition is troublesome for many whether it speaks of salvation or of a deeper commitment. As Beare asserts, Jesus was probably using a Semitic figure of speech: This is the more Semitic manner of speaking—Luke's words are the literal translation of an Aramaic original; but the verb "hate" does not carry its full sense. It means no more than "love less", and Matthew has turned this into the positive—not that they must love the immediate family less than Jesus, but they must love Him more. Loyalty to the Master must override even the closest family ties.⁴³

Jesus must be the object of one's supreme love and devotion if one is to be His disciple. But in both Matthew and Luke, the words are applied to believers only. In Matthew, the saying is in the context of a warning about family members who will be divided over Christ (Matthew 10:34-35). In such a situation, a person who is convinced that Jesus is the Messiah will have his ongoing loyalty tested by those in the family who disagree. This would present a great temptation to choose family ties and harmony over one's identity with Christ. In Luke, the saying is applied to anyone who "comes to" Jesus, which denotes those who believe in Him, as noted earlier.

Therefore, MacArthur rightly interprets the meaning of the idiom itself, "We must be unquestionably loyal to Him."⁴⁴ However, this interpretation does not apply to the unsaved, for one more naturally learns love and loyalty on the basis of what Jesus has done in redemption and forgiveness. The Bible teaches that God offers salvation to people as sinners, that is, apart from their love and loyalty to Christ (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 4:10). Even thus softened (as a Semitic figure of speech), such a devoted love for God over blood relationships would be an extraordinary demand for sinners who have had no experience of Christ's redeeming love.

Furthermore, it cannot speak of salvation because Matthew records that any loyalty that preempts loyalty to Christ makes or shows one to be "not worthy" of Christ (Matthew 10:37). The statement about unworthiness seems to imply the converse, that one can be worthy of Christ. However, the unsaved are unworthy of Christ and His salvation because they do not believe, not because they are loyal to family ahead of Christ. Conversely, no amount of loyalty to God or any other form of good deed makes a sinner worthy of Christ's righteousness. One can only be worthy for rewards.

Like the previous demands, this demand cannot speak of salvation. It is truth which brings believers into a deeper relationship with Jesus as Lord through their loyalty to Him.

2. Forsake All (Luke 14:33)

Another condition that Jesus gives is that "Whoever does not forsake all... cannot be My disciple." It shares the same context as the condition discussed above (Luke 14:27) and is therefore addressed to believers. Following the illustrations of a builder and of a king who did not make the necessary provision to finish their commitments, this condition demands that a believer commit or surrender whatever possessions are necessary in order for him to follow God's will. "All that he has" translates *pasi tois heautou hyparchousin* which speaks of one's property or possessions.⁴⁵ The condition is in absolute terms. Perhaps realizing the difficulty of making this a demand for unbelievers who wish to be saved, Lordship Salvation teachers sometimes soften this and other conditions to a willingness to forsake all. MacArthur says, Do we literally have to give away everything we own to become Christians? No, but we do have to be willing to forsake all (Luke 14:33), meaning we cling to nothing that takes precedence over Christ (emphasis his).⁴⁶ But Jesus did not say one must only be willing. Even if one only had to be willing to do these things for salvation, salvation would be just as conditional and meritorious as if they were actual works. This negates the concept of grace (Romans 4:4). Furthermore, the subjectivity of willingness makes salvation elusive, as Zuck notes:

Willingness to do something is not the same thing as actually doing it, and it does not answer the question, "How much commitment is necessary?" If lordship proponents do not mean a person must surrender everything to be saved, then why do they say all must be surrendered?⁴⁷ 3. Abide in His Word (John 8:30-31) This passage will be considered because it is usually thought to be a condition of discipleship spoken to unbelievers. Speaking of Jesus' ministry, John writes, "As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed.'" Many commentators assign Jesus' words to those who had a counterfeit or spurious faith. For example, Morris states, This section of discourse is addressed to those who believe, and yet do not believe. Clearly they are inclined to think that what Jesus said was true. But they were not prepared to yield Him the far-reaching allegiance that real trust in Him implies.⁴⁸ However, the passage is best understood as a condition of discipleship

directed to true believers, as can be shown.

It is argued that "believed Him" in John 8:31 indicates inadequate faith by the use of *pisteuo* ("believe") without the preposition *eis* ("in"). But it is obvious that those addressed in John 8:31 are the same as those in John 8:30 who "believed in Him" (*pisteuo eis auton*), which is a strong term denoting salvation.⁴⁹ Also, there is overwhelming evidence that *pisteuo* without the preposition does not prove that faith is inadequate for salvation.⁵⁰ Salvation is clearly meant in John 8:24 where *pisteuo* with no preposition is used when Jesus states, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

It is also argued that the hostility of these believers continues (John 8:33 ff.), and Jesus calls them children of the devil (John 8:44). This continuing hostility reflects the opposition of the Jews, which is a major motif of this section. In light of what has been argued thus far, John 8:31-32 show Jesus briefly directing His attention to those Jews who were saved as He taught in the temple. John's commentary in John 8:30 is inserted before Jesus' remarks to direct the reader to a change of focus by Christ before the opposition resumes in John 8:33 as a reaction to Christ's remarks.⁵¹ As soon as He finishes His remarks to these believers, the Jews raise another objection, just as they have been doing from the start of the dialogue (cf. John 8:13, John 8:19, John 8:22, John 8:25). The objection of John 8:33, being totally out of character with the inclination of those mentioned in John 8:31-32, shows that the identity of those in John 8:33 is assumed to be the antagonistic unbelieving Jews, not the new believers.⁵² This interpretation is most reasonable because it prevents Christ, who says in John 8:45 "you do not believe Me," from contradicting John, who said they "believed in Him" and "believed Him" (John 8:30-31). It also has greater exegetical and theological consistency than that view which would say these are "believers who did not really believe." The condition for becoming disciples in John 8:31 should not be construed as an admonition to unbelievers. In fact, the opposite is indicated by the emphatic plural pronoun "you" (*hymeis*) which distinguishes the new believers from the rest of the Jews.⁵³ Also, Jesus' admonition is not to enter His word, but to abide (*meno*) or continue in it. The assumption that they are already in His word indicates that abiding is a condition for further knowledge of the truth and freedom in Christ. Discipleship, as abiding in intimacy with Christ, is elsewhere in John made conditional on love and obedience (e.g., John 13:35, John 14:15, John 14:21, John 14:23, John 15:4, John 15:7, John 15:10, John 15:14).

III. The Difference Between Discipleship and Salvation

Synthesizing the observations of this and the previous two articles, we find a clear distinction between committed discipleship and salvation. These differences between simple salvation and discipleship cannot be ignored: Salvation is a free gift; intimate discipleship is costly. Salvation relates primarily to Christ as Savior; discipleship relates primarily to Christ as Lord. Salvation involves the will of God in redemption and reconciliation; discipleship involves the whole will of God. Salvation's sole condition is "believe"; discipleship's conditions are abide, obey, love, deny oneself, take up the cross, follow, lose one's life, "hate" one's family, etc. Salvation is a new birth; discipleship is a lifetime of growth. Salvation depends on Christ's work on the Cross for all people; discipleship depends on a believer carrying his or her cross for Christ. Salvation is a response to Christ's death and resurrection; discipleship is a response to Christ's life. Salvation determines eternal destiny; discipleship determines eternal and temporal rewards. Salvation is obtained by

faith; discipleship is obtained by faith through works. The difference is the same as that between justification and sanctification. These realities are related, but we do not encourage sanctification before justification. Justification is through faith alone; sanctification is through a life of progressive faithful obedience. Justification can take place apart from sanctification, but sanctification cannot take place apart from justification. With justification comes the Spirit and His power to accomplish sanctification. The sequence of justification before sanctification, salvation before discipleship, or faith before commitment is clearly taught in the Bible. Many verses appeal for commitment on the basis of grace already received (e.g., Romans 12:1; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 2:6). The teaching of Titus 2:11-12 is especially relevant because it explicitly relates grace to the believer's sanctification. This passage shows that commitment and obedience come in retrospective response to grace, not in prospective anticipation of it: For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age. The grace received in salvation is the basis of further Christian commitment, not vice versa. It is significant that Paul uses a verb to express the idea of training that is different from the idea usually related to discipleship expressed by *matheteuo*. The verb he chooses (*paideuo*, "teach") is rooted in the Greek idea of training a child (*paidion*).⁵⁴ Grace, when received, takes an immature person and trains him toward godliness. This and other NT admonitions to commit one's life to godly principles on the basis of grace received would seem superfluous if such a commitment was understood and made before salvation. The commitment of discipleship is expected of Christians only. The difference between discipleship and salvation cannot, therefore, be called a paradox. If salvation could somehow be free but costly, then this might be called a paradox. But this attempt by the Lordship Salvation position to maintain theological orthodoxy (justification by faith alone) while demanding a price from the sinner (costly grace) cannot be biblically justified. Romans 11:6 makes works and grace mutually exclusive, as does Romans 4:5 : "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7). It may cost to be or continue as a Christian, but not to become a Christian. To cite biblical examples where the Gospel is presented without cost would be superfluous.

IV. Conclusion Our examination of the conditions of discipleship given in the Gospels show that they are directed toward challenging believers to live lives of obedience, surrender, sacrifice, and self-denial. There is not the slightest evidence that they are intended for unbelievers. To make them so confuses the freeness of the Gospel and nullifies the grace of God in salvation.

Discipleship is indeed costly, but the cost can only be paid in response to the grace received at salvation. As a believer understands the sacrifice of God for his redemption, he will want to respond to the grace given with a reciprocal commitment. As he learns to also sacrifice, obey, and deny himself, he will become more like the Savior who exemplifies these things.

Salvation is by grace; discipleship is costly. The popularized term "costly grace" does not present a paradox, but an absurdity. It is as much a misnomer as "cheap grace."

There is only one kind of grace, and by definition it is absolutely free! The only sense in which salvation is costly is in the fact that Jesus Christ paid the supreme price, His life, for the sinner's redemption. Unfortunately, this is not the focus of Lordship teaching, which finds cost in the human conditions for salvation. To the sinner, salvation is absolutely free. If it were costly to him in any

sense, then it could no longer be of grace and Christianity would take its place alongside the rest of the world's religions.

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Footnotes:

1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1963), 45, 47. Bonhoeffer's view of grace seemed more shaped by his experience than by biblical exegesis. His book, first published in 1937 and in English in 1949, was prompted by the accommodation of the church in Germany to Hitler. He was concerned about those members of the state church who presumed they were going to heaven but gave little or no place to the lordship of Christ in their daily affairs or their political stance.

2 *Ibid.*, 55.

3 Harry L. Poe, "Evangelism and Discipleship," in *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Thom. S. Rainer, 133-44 (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989), 136. It is disturbing that Lordship theology appears to originate more from pragmatics than from biblical and theological inquiry. Books by Lordship Salvation teachers consistently begin with a statement of the problem of worldly Christians as a justification for a costly Gospel (e.g., James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1986], 13; Walter J. Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* [Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970; Reprint, 1985], 13-14; John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988], 16). If the majority of Christians were living committed lives, one wonders if there would be a "problem" with the Gospel message at all.

4 J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 73.

5 E.g., MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 29-30, 196-98; Boice, *Discipleship*, 13-23; Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976), 76.

6 MacArthur writes, "Eternal life is indeed a free gift (Romans 6:23). Salvation cannot be earned with good deeds or purchased with money. It has already been bought by Christ, who paid the ransom with his blood. But that does not mean there is no cost in terms of salvation's impact on the sinner's life. This paradox may be difficult but it is nevertheless true: salvation is both free and costly" (MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 140). It is not clear what MacArthur means by "cost in terms of salvation's impact on the sinner's life." Here he seems to be saying that the effect ("impact") of salvation after it is received exacts a price of obedience, surrender, etc., from the one who was saved. If this is the case, then the reception of the gift of salvation should still be spoken of as free; it is only subsequent sanctification that is costly. This would not present a paradox at all.

7 The term "Free Grace" may seem superfluous to those who believe that grace by definition is a free and undeserved gift. However, the debate has forced the articulation. It has clarifying value in a controversy where "costly grace" has become the cornerstone term of the opposing Lordship Salvation position. The reader is reminded that the same thing happened in the inerrancy debate so that the term "Word of God" became insufficient in the articulation of the verbal inerrantists'

position and so evolved into "inspired Word of God," "inerrant inspired Word of God," and "inerrant verbally inspired Word of God," all of which are redundant or superfluous to one who believes that the Bible is without error!

8 Charles C. Bing, "Coming to Terms with Discipleship," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 5 (Spring 1992), 35-49, and "The Making of a Disciple," *JOTGES* 5 (Autumn 1992), 27-43.

9 E.g., see MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 30.

10 See Herman N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, transl. Ray Togtman, *The Bible Student's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 312.

11 That the transfiguration occurs immediately after these pronouncements about discipleship in all three accounts reinforces the idea of the completion of God's will which brings glorification. Jesus' glorification looks forward to His consummate glory in the kingdom, achieved through His costly obedience.

12 For further discussion on the significance of ochlos, see Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), 247-48. William L. Lane comments on Mark 8:34 : "By calling the crowd Jesus indicates that the conditions for following him are relevant for all believers, and not for the disciples alone." William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 306.

13 The parallel conditions of Matthew 10:1-42 are stated to the Twelve (Matthew 10:5), while a different passage, Luke 14:26 ff., is addressed to the "great multitudes" who "went with Him" (Luke 14:25).

14 Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke. The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 248. The portrayal of the multitudes in general in Luke is very similar to Mark's, although a few times Luke shows Christ's antagonists associated with the term ochlos (cf. 3:7 [but see v. 10]; 5:29; 11:14-15; 12:54-56). Interestingly, Luke sometimes shows that there was a large number (ochlos) of "disciples" (6:17; 7:11).

15 John 2:11 confirms that the early disciples had believed in Christ. More contextually relevant, the vicarious confession of Peter, which precedes the pericope under consideration, represents the disciples' faith in Jesus as the messianic Savior and the divine Son of God (Matthew 16:16//Mark 8:29//Luke 9:20).

16 One might argue that it is equally pointless to declare the conditions of discipleship to those already called disciples. However, this ignores the progression of revelation which accompanied and characterized Jesus' ministry. Jesus consistently challenged His followers to a greater commitment to the will of God regardless of their present status. The disciple was always becoming more fully a disciple. This was the thesis of the second article in our series.

17 See Bing, "Coming to Terms," *JOTGES* 5,39-40, and "The Making of a Disciple," 5, 39.

18 John R. W. Stott, "Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior?—Yes," *Eternity* 10 (September 1959), 18.

19 Gentry, "The Great Option," BRR 5:174.

20 Stott, "Yes," Eternity 10, 18.

21 Boice, Discipleship, 40.

22 Lane, Mark, 307-308.

23 Cf. Acts 3:18, Acts 17:3, Acts 26:23, Romans 5:6-10, Colossians 1:21-22, Hebrews 13:12, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 Peter 3:18. A Lordship advocate might respond that these demands are not to be done in prospect of salvation, but in retrospect as the necessary proof of salvation and perseverance. We must then ask why they declare them conditions of salvation integral to the Gospel itself and to be preached to unbelievers. We can only assume they mean what they say when they write, for example, "Let me say again unequivocally that Jesus' summons to deny self and follow Him was an invitation to salvation" (MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196), or, "In our own presentation of Christ's gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and make sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness" (Packer, *Evangelism*, 73). Clearly, stated like this, works are required for salvation in Lordship theology.

24 John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1958), 114. See also, Boice, *Discipleship*, 42; and MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 202.

25 This is inconsistent with his application of this passage to unbelievers and confusing in the context of his discussion about salvation. See *Basic Christianity*, 114, and "Yes," *Eternity* 10, 18.

26 Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 114. Also, I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke. The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1978), 374.

27 Gentry, "The Great Option," BRR 5:75; Boice, *Discipleship*, 38; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 201-202.

28 So R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 645.

29 See the discussion in Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd ed. revised and enlarged (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1992), 96-101.

30 So M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), 175; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 350.

31 Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 114. See also the NIV translation "self" in Luke 9:25.

32 Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), s.v. "apollymi," 94-95. A majority of uses in the NT are clearly not soteriological.

33 *Ibid.*, s.v. "zemioo," 339. Instances of its use in other passages never speak of eternal destruction. One eschatological use refers to a believer who "suffers loss" yet is "saved" eternally (1 Corinthians 3:15).

34 As Stott (Basic Christianity, 117) suggests.

35 Matthew's use of *arneomai*, "deny," basically conveys little different meaning from Mark and Luke's use of *epaischynomai*, "be ashamed." See Marshall, Luke, 377.

36 Stott, Basic Christianity, 117; Boice, Discipleship, 117; MacArthur, The Gospel, 198-200.

37 Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. "apodidomi," 89-90. For clear examples of a good reward, see Matthew 6:4, Matthew 6:6, Matthew 6:18.

38 Recompense, and not salvation specifically, seems to be the context for Matthew's mention of confessing Christ in Matthew 10:32-33. As discussed, the context warns of persecution and rejection (Matthew 10:16-31; Matthew 10:34-36). In such persecution, those who shrink from confessing Christ will be denied the reward of Christ confessing them before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32-33). Furthermore, the issue of one's worthiness (Matthew 10:37-39) implies the idea of merit, which implies either reward or lack of reward. Jesus then spoke of rewards for those who were not ashamed of identifying with Him and His disciples (Matthew 10:40-42; cf. Matthew 5:11-12. In Matthew 10:41-42 Jesus uses the word *misthos*, which in the majority of its NT usages denotes a positive "wage" or "reward" (A Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. "misthos," 525).

39 For this idea see Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 1:83; Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in The Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1980), 1:167.

40 Stott, Basic Christianity, 114.

41 MacArthur, The Gospel, 202.

42 It is difficult to reconcile MacArthur's statement that these conditions are "not absolute in the sense that it disallows temporary failures like Peter" (*ibid.*) with his intentionally absolutist choice of language in the preceding quotation.

43 Francis Wright Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 250. See also, C. F. Evans, Saint Luke (London: SCM Press, 1990), 577; William F. Arndt, Luke, Concordia Classic Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 344; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 257.

44 MacArthur, The Gospel, 201. Stott and Boice have similar interpretations (Stott, "Yes," Eternity 10, 18; Boice, Discipleship, 117).

45 Greek English Lexicon, s.v. "hyparcho," 845.

46 MacArthur, The Gospel, 84. MacArthur is commenting on the lesson learned from the example of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23), which he believes is summarized by Luke 14:33 (p. 78). This story is preeminently used by Lordship teachers to argue that salvation is costly. E.g., MacArthur, The Gospel, 77ff.; Gentry, "The Great Option," BRR 5:61,75; Arens J. ten Pas, The Lordship of Christ (n.p.: Ross House Books, 1978), 5; Elmer R. Enlow, "Eternal Life: On What Conditions?," Alliance Witness (January 19, 1972), 4; Paul Fromer,

"The Real Issue in Evangelism," *His* 18 (June 1958), 5; Homer A. Kent, "Review Article: The Gospel According to Jesus," *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (1989), 71; J. Wallis, "Many to Belief, But Few to Obedience" *Sojourners* (March 1976), 21-22; Poe, "Evangelism and Discipleship," *Evangelism*, 138. Chantry structures his whole Lordship presentation around the rich young ruler in his book, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* I believe that the demand Jesus made of the rich young ruler was not a condition of eternal life. However, the argument deserves more space than this article can afford. Given its prolific use, the pericope would best be treated as the subject of a future article.

47 Roy B. Zuck, "Cheap Grace?," *Kindred Spirit* 13 (Summer 1989): 6-7.

48 Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1971), 454. Nearly all commentators who argue for a spurious faith in 2:23-24 will also argue for it here.

49 Gentry agrees this is a strong term for salvation (Gentry, "The Great Option," *BRR* 5:56).

50 Note the absence of the preposition in these soteriological passages: Matthew 9:28; John 5:24, John 8:24, John 11:42, John 13:19, John 14:10, John 17:8, John 17:21, John 20:31; Acts 16:34; Acts 18:8; Romans 4:3; Romans 10:9; Galatians 3:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:12; Titus 3:8; 1 John 5:1, 1 John 5:5, 1 John 5:10. That *pisteuo* alone or *pisteuo* with *hoti* ("believe that") can denote salvation as easily as the *pisteuo eis* construction is the conclusion of a number of scholars. See Rudolph Bultmann, s.v. "*pisteuo*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, transl. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Vol. 6 (1969), 203; Richard Christianson, "The Soteriological Significance of *Pisteuo* in the Gospel of John" (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1987), 86-87; Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MO: Trinity Foundation, 1983), 101; Elizabeth Jarvis, "The Key Term 'Believe' in the Gospel of John," *Notes on Translation* 2 (1988), 46-51; Morris, *John*, 337; E. Herbert Nygren, "Faith and Experience," *The Covenant Quarterly* 41 (August 1983), 41-42; M. F. Sadler, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), 221; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:561.

51 This Johannine technique of editorial explanation is further discussed in Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd. ed., 43-44. See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 627.

52 Lenski, *John*, 628.

53 *Ibid.*, 628.

54 Dieter Furst, s.v. "*paideuo*," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, eds. Lothar Coenen, Erick Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, trans. and ed. Cohn Brown, vol. 3 (1981), 775-79. He comments on Titus 2:11-12 : 'Here too education is an outworking of grace... what is being said here is that man is justified by grace and led by it into sanctification' (p. 779).

01.15. Coming to Terms With Discipleship - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1992

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Coming to Terms With Discipleship - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Spring 1992

Synopsis: This is a study of the terms used for disciples and discipleship. That is the first step in having a biblical understanding of what it means to be a disciple.

Coming to Terms with Discipleship

Discipleship affects every Christian. Not only are we to be disciples, but we are to make disciples of others. But what is a disciple? The meaning of discipleship has taken on greater significance with the unabating interest in the debate over the relationship between salvation and sanctification fueled by the Lordship Salvation controversy. Many on both sides are being challenged in their assumptions about what a disciple is. There remains a great need for biblical clarification on the issue. This article will look briefly at the confusion over the concept of discipleship, then attempt to define it from the NT data.

I. A Call for Clarification For decades a chorus of voices has been calling for a more precise definition of the biblical concept of discipleship while the Church goes on grappling with fulfilling her great commission to "make disciples." Christians have not lacked for books on how to be a disciple or how to make disciples of others. Too often these books are based on assumptions about what a disciple is while they take the meaning of discipleship for granted. Yet our understanding of biblical discipleship shapes our practice of evangelism, church growth, missions, and personal lifestyle.

A. Making Disciples When discipleship became a buzz-word of zealous Christian groups, there were some who were not happy with how it was being used (or abused!). For example, in 1971, J. Dwight Pentecost introduced his book on discipleship with this note: The subject of Discipleship is frequently discussed today. Men are called to become disciples without any definition of the concept, and without any clarification of the requirements the Lord makes of those who are His disciples. Hence no intelligent decision can be made concerning this important question.¹ Coming from a different perspective, but with the same concern, C. Peter Wagner wrote in 1973, The biblical concept of "disciple" has become a key term in contemporary evangelical missiology. Faced with the fuzzy use of the term in much popular literature and preaching, a closer look at the New Testament meaning of the word, together with its implications for missions, is now overdue.²

Little progress seems to have been made since then, however. Books on how to make disciples and how to fulfill the Great Commission have proliferated while confusion remains over exactly what a disciple is. One example comes out of the Church Growth Movement and its founder, Donald A. McGavran. His preliminary understanding of what a disciple is had to be clarified because of confusion over the term. He later refined his definition of discipleship by breaking it

down into three separate categories he called D1, D2, and D3, but some might say this only clouded the issue all the more.³

Another more recent example is the popular book *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker*, a book of methodology based on Jesus' training of the Twelve. To be sure, in the introduction Hull thought he defined a disciple clearly enough.⁴ But in his follow-up book, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, he finds it necessary to argue theologically for a more precise definition of discipleship, stating, "The irony of the church is that we throw the word disciple around freely, but too often with no definition."⁵

It is not my concern to evaluate these authors' views of discipleship at this point. I cite them only to show that a definition of the term cannot be taken for granted among today's Christians. This was confirmed to me by a recent visit to a Christian bookstore where only one of a half dozen books on disciple-making made an attempt to define clearly what a disciple is (and that attempt was not based on a biblical study!). This is in spite of the fact that, in comparing the books, one could discern several different assumptions about what a disciple is.

B. The Lordship Salvation Debate The meaning of discipleship is most hotly debated and reaches its most crucial significance in the Lordship Salvation controversy. The recent debate on the meaning of discipleship has been led on the Lordship Salvation side by prominent preachers such as John F. MacArthur, Jr. and James Montgomery Boice. Both contend that to be a Christian is to be a disciple.⁶ The view that discipleship is a commitment different from, but related to, one's salvation experience is defended by Free Grace teachers such as Charles C. Ryrie and Zane C. Hodges.⁷ Recognizing the disparity in definitions of discipleship between the two sides, Homer Kent has declared, "A fresh look at this matter is long overdue."⁸ The Lordship debate has done more than any other to show that there are two very different views of discipleship in the evangelical church today. The debate is important, for clearly discipleship is a foundational concept of the Christian life which dictates all that we are to be and much of what we are to be doing. If discipleship is becoming a Christian, as Lordship Salvation teaches, then the church must preach a gospel of commitment, surrender, and sacrifice as conditions of salvation, for these are the conditions of discipleship. To do less is to lead people to a false assurance of salvation. On the other hand, if discipleship is a commitment different from the salvation experience, as Free Grace proponents assert, then to teach a "costly" salvation is to pervert the Gospel. This series is designed to add to our understanding of the concept of disciple and discipleship by examining the words themselves and the relevant passages in the NT. I will relate the discussion of discipleship to the current Lordship Salvation debate in particular. This first article examines the key words used to denote discipleship and some important passages where they are found.

II. Discipleship in the New Testament

We will find that etymology is of little help in understanding the theological implications of being a disciple. However, some issues of usage will be very important to our discussion.

A. The Words Used

1. Disciple The word disciple translates the Greek noun *mathetes*, which is found 264 times in the Gospels and Acts. It is not found in the Epistles. The noun has the basic meaning of "a pupil, apprentice, adherent."⁹ The verb form, *matheteuo*, occurs four times in the Gospels and once in

Acts. It means to "be or become a pupil or disciple."¹⁰ That the meaning of the word disciple is never explained in the NT indicates that the early readers understood it in relation to contemporary rabbinic or Greek practice. It was used of learners who associated themselves with a teacher, philosopher, or rabbi with the assumption that the pupil would become like his teacher (Matthew 10:25; Luke 6:40).¹¹ The greater the student's submission to his master, the greater the student's transformation and likelihood that he would become the master's successor. The master's ultimate expectation was that each of his disciples would be proficient in his master's teaching.¹² In the NT we find followers of various teachers called disciples. The Pharisees claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28), because they were students and followers of the law which Moses gave (John 1:17). The Pharisees also had their own disciples (e.g., Matthew 22:16; Mark 2:18). Those who followed the teachings of John the Baptist were called his disciples (e.g., Matthew 9:14; Matthew 14:12; Mark 2:18; Luke 11:1; John 3:25). Most prevalent in the NT are those called disciples who identified themselves as followers or learners of Christ (e.g., Matthew 5:1; John 4:1; John 8:31, John 9:27-28), especially the twelve chosen as apostles (e.g., Matthew 10:1; Matthew 11:1, Matthew 20:17, Luke 9:1). A disciple is one who puts himself in the position of a learner. In relation to those who learned from Jesus, this definition in and of itself does not distinguish between those who are unsaved, simply saved, or saved and having made a deeper commitment. These distinctions are the issue in the Lordship Salvation debate. The particular meaning of disciple in any passage must be determined by the context, as we will see in the discussions below.

2. Follow The other word which speaks of discipleship in the NT is the verb usually translated "follow" (akoloutheo). It is used over sixty times in the Gospels in reference to following Christ. A parallel thought is expressed by the phrase "to come after" (opiso elthein) in relation to Christ (cf. Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23).

Like the word disciple, these terms do not indicate the spiritual condition of the person in view. The Gospels speak both of those who follow Christ in general and of those who follow with more commitment. Large crowds followed Jesus (e.g., Matthew 4:25, Matthew 8:1, Matthew 12:15, Matthew 21:9, Mark 10:32), but there were also individuals called to follow Him in a more intimate relationship (e.g., Matthew 9:9; Matthew 10:38, Matthew 16:24, Mark 2:14, Mark 8:34, Luke 5:27, Luke 9:23).

However, Lordship Salvation proponents consider the invitation of Jesus to "follow Me" an invitation to salvation. They argue not from the meaning of the word, but from incidents where it is used. After citing several encounters where Christ said "follow Me," Boice concludes, The command to follow Jesus was not understood by Him to be only a mere physical following or even an invitation to learn more about Him and then see if one wanted to be a permanent disciple or not. Jesus understood it as a turning from sin to salvation.¹³ This opinion is misinformed, because Jesus sometimes issued the invitation to follow Him to those who were clearly already believers (e.g., Matthew 8:21-22; Matthew 16:24; John 12:26; John 21:19, John 21:22). Like the term disciple, the significance of follow or come after must be determined from the context.

One occasion where "follow Me" is associated clearly with salvation is John 10:27-28 : "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." Both Boice and MacArthur cite this passage to argue that following Christ signifies the obedience that secures salvation.¹⁴

Two observations help us to understand the meaning of follow in this passage. First, it is used to describe what the subjects are doing, not to demand what they must do for salvation. It is a description of the visual response of the sheep to the Shepherd's voice.

Second, the interpretation of "follow Me" is rooted in the larger metaphor. John uses metaphors frequently to picture faith in Christ.¹⁵ Here the word follow pictures faith in Christ in that it focuses on the visible result of hearing. Faith itself is indicated by the sheep hearing Christ's voice. Hearing stands alone to represent faith in John 10:3, John 10:8, and John 10:16. Hearing is also used elsewhere by John to speak of faith (cf. John 5:24-25, John 8:43, John 8:47). Given the pastoral metaphor, it is hard to picture faith in any other way than in the sheep following the trusted voice of the Shepherd.¹⁶

Lordship Salvation's interpretation of John 10:27-28 not only ignores the metaphorical use of the term in this passage, it also neglects the context. In the verse immediately before John 10:27, Jesus rebukes the Jews, saying, "You do not believe, because you are not of my sheep." This contrast of the Jews' unbelief with the belief of Christ's sheep in the metaphor demonstrates that the focus of the discussion is on belief in Jesus as Messiah and Savior. The Lordship argument that follow in John 10:27-28 signifies an obedient lifestyle that brings salvation is an unfortunate misinterpretation. It does not prove that "follow Me" in the Gospels is an invitation to salvation. It only shows how crucial the context is in interpreting the term.

B. Discipleship in the Gospels

We will now see how the words disciple and follow are used in relation to those who learned from or followed the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels. They are used in a number of ways, which shows that those called disciples had varying degrees of the commitment to learn and submit.

1. Curious followers¹⁷ The broadest meaning of disciple in relation to Jesus Christ comes from those instances where the term may be used of the multitudes who followed Him. For example, in Matthew 5:1 it is unclear whether the multitude is identified synonymously with the disciples or the disciples are a smaller group within the multitude. Likewise, in Luke 6:13 Jesus chooses the twelve disciples from a larger group of followers also called disciples. In these settings Jesus is teaching and the multitude is willing to be taught, and thus in the general sense they could be called disciples (Matthew 5:2 ff.; Luke 6:20 ff.).

John 6:1-71 contributes an important truth about disciples. While the chapter begins with a distinction between the multitude and the disciples (cf. John 6:2-3, John 6:11, John 6:22), we later learn that among the group of disciples are unbelievers. After Jesus' Bread of Life discourse, John tells us that "many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying: Who can understand it?'" (John 6:60). In His answer to them Jesus said, "But there are some of you who do not believe," which John indicates included Judas Iscariot, who would betray Jesus later (John 6:64). When the text notes that "from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" (John 6:65), we are led to assume these unbelievers are a large part of the departing group. However, at least one unbeliever, Judas Iscariot, remains with the twelve disciples (John 6:67). This interchange with Jesus in John 6:1-71 shows that the term disciple in its broadest sense can even refer to unbelievers. They merit the term because outwardly they are followers or learners of Christ, though they may only have the barest personal commitment to Him.

In fact, their motivation seems little more than political (John 6:15), or to obtain free food (John 6:26, John 6:34), or simply to satisfy their curiosity. In a comment on this passage, MacArthur admits in a footnote:

It is apparent that not every disciple is necessarily a true Christian (cf. John 6:66). The term disciple is sometimes used in Scripture in a general sense, to describe those who, like Judas, outwardly followed Christ.¹⁸ This admission deserves more than a footnote! This is especially true coming from one who goes on to rigidly espouse discipleship as a complete and total surrender to Jesus as Master of one's life—and equates this with salvation. MacArthur is acknowledging, though minimally, that the context must inform one's definition of discipleship. In a review of MacArthur's book, Kent supports MacArthur's view of discipleship, but also agrees that the term is fluid, depending on the context. He concludes from John 6:66 "the term itself merely means 'a follower.' The nature of that discipleship must be derived from the larger context." It is somewhat disconcerting when Kent then goes on to assert, without appeal to any specific context, that "Those who have separated discipleship from salvation have not done us any service."¹⁹

We see that even those of the Lordship Salvation persuasion agree that the term disciple is flexible enough to refer to unbelievers.

2. Convinced followers

Those disciples who decided to remain with Jesus in John 6:1-71 include the Twelve. Acting as spokesman, Peter confesses their faith in Jesus as the Messiah (John 6:66-69). His statement springs more from a logical and settled conclusion than a vow of personal devotion. These men, except Judas, were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior. At this point in the text, however, we see no deep commitment.

Sometimes we note in the Gospels those who were undoubtedly believers in Jesus Christ, but who were reserved in their commitment to Him. Though obviously committed as well as saved, some, like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, never followed Christ in the sense of leaving their homes and families. John also mentions rulers of the Jews who avoided a full commitment to Jesus Christ as Master:

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43).

While some might argue circularly that because the rulers did not confess Christ publicly they never truly believed, this would ignore the context and the details of the text itself. John 6:42 begins with a strong adversative (*homos mentoi*) showing that from among the Jewish nation and leadership which did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah (John 6:37-41), there were individual exceptions who truly believed. If they were not true believers in Christ, John's contrast is muted and meaningless.²⁰ John clearly declares that they "believed in Him."

Apparently, Joseph of Arimathea is one of the rulers who believed. John describes him as "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38). Joseph's request for the body of Jesus and the subsequent public burial certainly ended his secrecy. Following Joseph's example, Nicodemus joins him in Christ's burial. It is said of Nicodemus that it was he "who first came to

Jesus by night" (John 19:38). Though John does not call Nicodemus a believer or a disciple, we get the sense from John 3:1-36 and this notation that he was in the same category as Joseph—a secret disciple finally gone public.

Jesus even offered a degree of commendation to those who had less than a full commitment to follow Him as Master. At one point, the Twelve rebuked a man casting out demons in Jesus' name because, they said, "he does not follow us" (Mark 9:38), or "he does not follow with us" (Luke 9:49). Though not a follower in the fullest sense, the man was declared by Jesus to be "on our side" (Mark 9:40), or "for us" (Luke 9:50), and Jesus implied that he would receive a reward (Mark 9:41). In some instances, Jesus was unsettlingly inclusive about who was considered a follower!

3. Committed followers The preponderance of references to disciples in the Gospels speaks of those who have submitted to Jesus Christ as Master of their lives. They are committed to following Jesus as their Lord and Teacher in the same sense in which others devotedly followed Moses, the Pharisees, or John the Baptist. In this sense the term disciples is used most frequently in the Gospels to speak of the smaller group of twelve apostles chosen by Christ (e.g., Matthew 10:1; Luke 6:13). In addition to the Twelve, however, a larger group of seventy is also called disciples (Luke 10:1, Luke 10:17, Luke 10:23). They too appear as those committed to Jesus in a special way since they are sent out by the Lord to preach the Gospel. The commitment involved in this deeper relationship is seen in the various conditions that Jesus attached to discipleship as His ministry progressed. He said that true disciples, or "disciples indeed" (*alethos mathetai*), are those who "abide in My word" (John 8:31). While a fuller interpretation of this condition will be offered in the third article in this series, it is enough to note here that this condition was stated to those whom the text says had already believed in Christ (John 8:30-31). The word "abide" (from *meno*) denotes the more intimate relationship that Christ desires of those who believe in Him (cf. John 14:21, John 14:23-24, John 15:4-10). As Jesus began to teach the significance of His work on the Cross, He also expounded other stringent conditions for those who would continue as disciples in the deeper sense. In these conditions (Matthew 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-26; and Luke 14:26-33), Jesus said a disciple must:

Deny himself Take up his cross

Follow Christ

Lose his life Not be ashamed of Christ Hate his family and his own life. The nature of these commitments and the fact that they were directed primarily to those who were already His close followers argue that they are conditions not of salvation, but of a deeper relationship to Jesus as Lord and Master.²¹ They represent a progression in the revelation of God's will which must be accepted if a believer would continue on the path of discipleship. By these conditions, discipleship becomes something which is very costly to the Christian.

C. Discipleship in Acts In Acts the term disciples seems to be equated with Christians in general (Acts 6:1-2, Acts 6:7, Acts 14:20, Acts 14:22, Acts 14:28, Acts 15:10, Acts 19:10), especially in Acts 11:26 where we read, "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Acts has no explicit mention of the deeper commitment or the conditions of discipleship found in the Gospels. Lordship Salvation proponents argue from this that there is no difference between a disciple and a Christian; believing in Christ encompasses the commitment to surrender all of one's life to Jesus

as Lord and Master and to follow Him in sacrifice and obedience.²²

We must agree that Acts assumes Christians are disciples. Disciple is one of several terms used to refer to Christians and is thus used more technically than in the Gospels. However, the background for Acts cannot be divorced from the Gospels. Whatever conditions for discipleship the Gospel authors recorded must give form to Luke's view of discipleship, especially those recorded by Luke himself. Furthermore, the bridge between discipleship in the Gospels and in Acts is composed of the final missionary commissions of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48). Acts records the fulfillment of these commissions as the Gospel is carried beyond Jerusalem to the remotest parts of the world (Acts 1:8). To develop this connection, a slight digression is necessary. Discipleship in Acts must be understood in light of Jesus' commission to "make disciples" in Matthew 28:19-20 :

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Since Acts records the disciples' obedience to this command, it is necessary to understand what Jesus means by "make disciples." Is He equating discipleship with salvation, as Lordship Salvation teaches? Gentry insists that Matthew 28:19 is simply a "fuller account" of the commission in Mark 16:15, which says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." He says, "The preaching of the gospel summarized in Mark is the making of disciples in Matthew." ²³ But we must take issue with Gentry's equating of the two commissions. If "preach the gospel" in Mark is a summary of Matthew's "make disciples," then preaching the Gospel includes baptizing and teaching obedience as elements that define the Gospel. However, it is clear that Paul did not consider baptism and obedience to "all things" which Christ commanded part of the saving Gospel (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 2:8-9), and we would agree. The parallel between the two commissions is found in the participle *poruthentes*, translated in both passages as "go." In both places it should be understood as "having gone or "as you go," which denotes a presupposed or simultaneous activity.²⁴ For Mark, the main activity is denoted by the finite verb "preach" (*keryxate*), but in Matthew by the finite verb "make disciples" (*matheteusate*). Matthew's "go" equals Mark's "go...preach the gospel" as the first step in making disciples.²⁵ While Mark's commission stops with gospel proclamation, Matthew speaks optimally in making discipleship the ultimate goal, which harmonizes with his emphasis on discipleship in his Gospel.²⁶ The other participles in Matthew, "baptizing" and "teaching," tell how to "make disciples." After the Gospel is believed, baptism is the first step of obedient discipleship, and teaching obedience to the commands of Christ is the means by which believers develop as disciples. In light of the commission in Matthew 28:19-20, it is natural that Christians should be called disciples in Acts, since Acts is the historical account of the fulfillment of that commission. As a historian writing selectively, Luke describes the early Christians in general as committed followers of Christ who continued in His teaching. He does not concern himself with the few believers who may not have associated with the Church. In Acts the early converts were enthusiastic in their commitment to Christ with but few exceptions.²⁷ For example, Luke notes how new believers do not hesitate to obey the Lord in baptism (cf. Acts 2:41, Acts 8:13, Acts 8:36, Acts 9:18, Acts 10:47-48, Acts 16:14-15, Acts 16:33-34, Acts 18:8, Acts 19:5). His historical perception of the early believers was that of a new community following the Christian Way with

diligence and the marks of true discipleship as enunciated by Jesus: They continued in the Word (Acts 2:42; cf. John 8:31), showed love for one another (Acts 2:42 and Acts 4:32; cf. John 13:34-35), and were willing to deny themselves worldly gain (Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:32-35; cf. Luke 9:24-25). Furthermore, the stringent conditions of discipleship preached by Christ were not preached by the Apostles in Acts. Indeed, it wasn't necessary, for these early believers were generally viewed as committed to Christ in discipleship. Calenburg notes, The sermons of Acts seemed to reaffirm the distinction between conversion by faith in Christ and committed discipleship. The general use of the term "disciple" for all believers and the practice of many new converts implied [that] committed discipleship to Christ was the common and expected response to His will as taught by the Apostles.²⁸ That the first Christians were committed as disciples is no surprise in light of the hostile Jewish environment. For a Jew to become a publicly confessed Christian was ipso facto to bear the cross of Christ's suffering through certain persecution, ostracism, or even death.

Christians are called disciples in Acts, because as Luke sees it, these early believers are committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is every indication that as a whole, these believers were meeting the conditions for true discipleship found in the Gospels.

D. Discipleship in the Epistles The assumption that Christians were committed disciples in Acts harmonizes with the absence of the word disciple in the Epistles. Conceptually, the idea of discipleship is communicated through the noun "imitator" (mimetes) and the verb "imitate" (mimeomai).²⁹ Calenburg concludes that "The factors involved in such imitation were similar to the conditions of discipleship, namely, observation, attachment, motivation, submission to authority, and obedience."³⁰ When Paul exhorts his readers to "imitate me" (e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; cf. Php 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 2 Thessalonians 3:9), he desires a committed response to him as he is committed to and so imitates Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1; cf 1 Thessalonians 1:6). Imitation is therefore the commitment of a believer to follow Christ as a disciple. Bauder observes,

"Imitation" in the NT is consequently not conceived as the reproduction of a given pattern. It is... an attitude of thanks in response to the salvation that has been given to us (cf. H. Conzelmann, Epheser, 83). The summons to discipleship can only be fulfilled, when a man is grasped by Christ and undergoes the transformation which existence under the Lordship of Christ involves.³¹ To imitate Jesus or Paul is to follow them so as to reproduce their character and behavior. This "Christlikeness" is the goal of discipleship. The Epistles, by implicitly equating discipleship with imitation, affirm that discipleship is the commitment of believers to obey and submit to the authority of Christ. However, since the Epistles never teach that salvation is procured through imitation of Jesus Christ, neither is it procured through discipleship, which is the same thing.

III. Conclusion

We have found in our study on the meaning of discipleship that in the NT disciple is a somewhat fluid term. It is used of those who obviously had never believed in Christ, of believers with limited commitment, and of believers with the fullest commitment. The ultimate determination of its meaning in any given passage must be the context. Sometimes, as in Acts, consideration of the context involves the perspective of the whole book. To be a disciple in the broadest sense is to be a follower or learner of Jesus Christ. In the narrower sense used by Christ later in His ministry, it

meant to be fully committed to follow and learn from Him in a life of self-denial and obedience to His Word. This latter idea is the most relevant to the Lordship Salvation debate and to our practice as Christians. The stringent conditions Christ attached to this sense of discipleship should not be made conditions of salvation, but should move us who are Christians further into God's will.

We cannot ignore the degrees of discipleship presented in the NT. Whether as a minimal commitment or full surrender, discipleship denotes a direction or an orientation more than a state. It is a journey, not an arrival. Anywhere on one's journey toward Christ, one can be called a disciple. Though all disciples find themselves at different points on the journey, the committed disciple is seen as well on the way with his destination clearly in view.

Therefore, we must regard with suspicion those who make absolute statements about what a disciple is or those who make the simplistic charge that the Free Grace position teaches two classes of Christians: ordinary Christians and super-Christians.³² Though sometimes used to refer to Christians in general (as explained in relation to Acts), the majority of uses by the Lord Jesus indicates that full-fledged discipleship is when a believer fully submits to Christ's Word and Christ's will in all areas of life. Lordship Salvation not only confuses discipleship with salvation, but also confuses entry-level discipleship with the ultimate goal of committed discipleship.

Only when we recognize what a disciple is in the NT can we effectively fulfill our Lord's commission to make disciples and become fully committed disciples ourselves.

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Footnotes:

1 J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 11.

2 C. Peter Wagner, "What Is 'Making Disciples?'" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1973): 285.

3 See Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 170; or read an analysis of McGavran's view of discipleship in C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 130-33.

4 Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990; originally published at Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1984), 9-12.

5 Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1988), 54-60.

6 See John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 29-30, 196-98; James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 13-23.

7 Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), 77-91; *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, TX: Redencin Viva, 1981), 35-45; *Absolutely Free!* (Dallas, TX: Redencin Viva, 1989), 67-76; Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing The Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody

Press, 1969), 178-79; So Great Salvation (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 101-14.

8 Homer A. Kent, "Review Article: The Gospel According to Jesus," *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (1989): 75.

9 A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, compiled by Walter Bauer, trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. "mathetes," 486-87.

10 *Ibid.*, s.v. "matheteuo," 486. This is the intransitive meaning.

11 See also K. H. Rengstorf, s.v. "mathetes," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4:415-41; and Richard D. Calenburg, *The New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship* (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 20-40.

12 Shmuel Safrai, "Master and Disciple," *Jerusalem Perspective* 3 (November-December 1990): 5, 13.

13 Boice, *Discipleship*, 17.

14 *Ibid.*, 166-67; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 178.

15 For example, "come" (John 5:40, John 6:35, John 6:37, John 6:44, John 6:65, John 7:37); "enter" (John 10:9); "eat" (John 6:51-58); "drink" (John 4:13, John 6:53-56, John 7:37); "accept" (John 1:12, John 5:34). See George Allen Turner, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (Fall 1976): 272-73.

16 See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, eds. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 343-44. He contrasts the metaphorical use of follow, which he takes as equivalent to believe, with its meaning of discipleship in other passages in John. Essentially the same view is taken by Zane C. Hodges in *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981), 43-45.

17 This convenient outline of Curious, Convinced, Committed I credit to Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, who has greatly influenced my understanding of discipleship.

18 MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196, n. 2.

19 Kent, "Review Article," 75.

20 Among those who agree that these rulers actually believed are Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 1:487; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 605; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John, The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 2:452; Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 5:232.

21 This assertion and an explanation of these conditions will be the substance of the third article in this series.

22 MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196; Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976): 49-79; Charles Price, *Real Christians* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1987), 54.

23 Gentry, "The Great Option," 70; See also Boice, *Discipleship*, 159-169; Kent, *Review Article*, 75.

24 Robert D. Culver, "What Is the Church's Commission?: Some Exegetical Issues in Matthew 28:16-20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 July-September 1968): 243-53; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol.8, 595.

25 So William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, *New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 999; Wagner, "Making Disciples," 286-87.

26 Sheridan explains the emphasis on discipleship in Matthew from this Gospel's purpose: For Matthew, the comprehensive charge to his followers by Jesus is 'to make disciples of all nations.' Teaching others to observe what Jesus had taught them is the way to achieve this. In a sense, Matthew's gospel is a manual for discipleship, and we may expect to find in the lengthy discourses to the disciples not just instruction for the twelve limited to their historical mission but essentially what they are to pass on in their efforts to make disciples." Mark Sheridan, "Disciples and Discipleship in Matthew and Luke," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 3 (October 1973): 240-41. See also Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel* (Leiden, The Netherlands: F. J. Brill, 1988), 221-22; Wolfgang Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthaus-Evangeliums*, 3d. auflage (Munehen: Kosel-Verlag, 1964), 21ff. Trilling begins his Matthean theology with this commission and its emphasis on discipleship.

27 Exceptions would be Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:13 ff.), and the Ephesian sorcerers (Acts 19:10-19). Even so, the latter two accounts lead us to believe that these believers would probably continue in Christ's teachings.

28 Calenburg, "Discipleship," 238-39. See also 197-200.

29 So W. Michaelis, s.v. "mimeomai," in *TDNT* 4:673; W. Bauder, s.v. "mimeomai," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* 1:492.

30 Calenburg, "Discipleship," 239.

31 Bauder, *Ibid.*

32 For example, see Dallas Willard, "Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?" *Christianity Today* 24 (October 10, 1980), 24 25,27.

01.16. Disciples Are Made Not Born!* - Grace in Focus, May 1992

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Disciples Are Made Not Born!* - Grace in Focus, May 1992

Synopsis: A summary of a longer journal article of the same title. It shows that not all believers are disciples and that the conditions for eternal salvation and discipleship are different.

Disciples are made, not born. This is clearly evident in the life of Peter. The recurrent calls of Christ to Peter to follow Him show that there is a sense in which a disciple can always become more of a disciple. The call to follow persists throughout the life of a disciple. In Peter's life we see a funnel effect. The progressive calls to follow begin with a general direction and commitment, but become more and more specific in what that commitment entails. Each time the disciple is called to follow, new significance is attached. With each call, the disciple is challenged to a deeper commitment and a greater sacrifice.

Discipleship is a direction or orientation, not a state. It is a committed and progressive following of Jesus Christ as Master. Anywhere on one's journey toward becoming like Christ one can be called a disciple, even in the midst of a temporary failure. It seems reasonable to state that anyone who rejects the challenge to commit himself to Christ ceases to follow and removes himself from the path of discipleship. To confuse the call to discipleship with the call to salvation is a simplistic and confusing approach to the Scriptures and real-life experience. It is disturbing to take the conclusions of the Lordship position to their inevitable end. If the deeper relationship of discipleship is not distinguished from salvation, then many or most professing evangelicals - including Lordship Salvationists - are lost. Hull shows the incongruity of such a view with reality when he speaks of true disciples:

If disciples are born not made, while these characteristics would take time to develop, they would develop 100 percent of the time in the truly regenerate. Therefore, every single Christian would be a healthy, reproducing believer. If people did not reflect the disciple's profile, then they would not be Christians (Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* [1988]: p.55).

Lordship Salvation teaching has imposed a standard for salvation that most professing Christians cannot meet. This by itself does not make it wrong. But it does make it dubious in the extreme. The issues of salvation and discipleship must remain distinct if one is to appreciate the wonders of each. The call to salvation through faith alone with no other conditions beautifies the doctrine of grace. The call to discipleship with its hard conditions make the Christian life more meaningful and purposeful. Not surprisingly then, Lordship Salvation theology is detrimental to the Church since it fails to keep the issues of salvation and discipleship distinct. As Hull writes, The "disciples are born and not made" theology has many harmful effects. Some quarters accept it because they have not stood that theology toe to toe with Jesus' definitions. When it does stand toe to toe, it creates a gospel of works. It adds to the requirements for salvation. Not only does it require faith in Christ, but commitment to the disciple's profile is required. Unless you are willing to commit to world evangelism, labor in the harvest field, placing Christ before everything in your life, then in the

words of Jesus, "You cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:25-35); therefore you are denied salvation (The Disciple Making Pastor, p.55).

Disciples are made, not born. When we understand this, our Gospel remains truly of grace. Then as those saved by grace, we are motivated to cooperate with God and commit and submit ourselves to His purpose of conforming us to His Son, our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

01.17. Lordship Salvation: A Horse With Wheels - Grace in Focus, May 1992

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Lordship Salvation: A Horse With Wheels - Grace in Focus, May 1992

Synopsis: This controversial view of the gospel confuses the condition of eternal salvation with the consequences of salvation. We must keep the requirement of belief distinct from the result of obedience. In a discussion I had with a seminary professor, the Lordship Salvation debate was characterized as follows: "Lordship Salvation puts the cart [works] before the horse [salvation through faith], but you in the Free Grace movement detach the cart from the horse." Does Free Grace detach works from salvation and faith as Lordship Salvation accuses? Another way of stating this charge is that Free Grace detaches sanctification (in its progressive aspect) from justification by faith. The question is, is this a legitimate charge, or a floppy straw man?

I think this professor's metaphor is misguided and reflects a misunderstanding of both positions.

It misunderstands the Lordship position in that they do not teach works before salvation ("the cart before the horse"), at least not explicitly. Every Lordship teacher I have encountered vehemently denies the heresy of salvation by works. Of course, we argue that they are inconsistent when they attach the conditions of submission and obedience to faith. Still, they deny works before salvation. The professor's metaphor also misunderstands the Free Grace position by suggesting that we detach the cart from the horse. Our position holds that works follow salvation through faith (Titus 2:11-12). This conclusion is based on the inference of Scripture, the nature of regeneration, the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the life-changing power of understanding grace.

However, we contend that works are not always visible or measurable in a believer's life. It is also possible for believers to persist in sins. More importantly, we insist that progressive sanctification should not be confused with justification. Submission and obedience after salvation involve much more than the simple submission and obedience to the command to believe before salvation. When Lordship teachers fail to make this distinction, they mix merit with grace or works with faith. In effect, they put the cart's wheels on the horse--which makes a freakish and dysfunctional beast!

We maintain that there is an essential relationship between sanctification and justification, but that there is also a vital distinction between the two. Justification is God's declaration of our righteousness through Christ when we believe. Sanctification is God's work of progressively changing us as we continue to cooperate with Him. Justification is the starting point of sanctification (Romans 6:15-23), but not necessarily a guarantee that sanctification's results will be seen to the satisfaction of those who desire to measure them.

It is not uncommon for believers in Jesus Christ to give abundant evidence of their faith through their good works. But, how can works be accurately measured? Who can determine the crossover point from non-Christian to Christian? Faith in God's provision and promise is the only objective

criterion by which salvation can be determined. My professor friend was mistaken in his metaphor. He had built two straw men that were easy for him to knock down.

What he should have seen is that Lordship Salvation tries to put wheels on a horse. The result is that they have neither a horse nor a cart. Remember that horses with wheels have historically meant trouble--just ask the residents of ancient Troy!

Lordship's horse with wheels can destroy the assurance, freedom, and growth of unsuspecting Christians. Like its Trojan counterpart, it is an unwelcome beast within the walls of Grace.

01.18. The Making of a Disciple - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Autumn 1992

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing The Making of a Disciple - Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Autumn 1992

Synopsis:

Discipleship is a process, or a lifetime journey. We see that in biblical teaching and in the stories about the Apostle Peter. The Making of a Disciple

How does God make a disciple? Does a person who becomes a Christian also automatically become a disciple? When Jesus said, "Follow Me," was He inviting people to salvation or to something more? This second article in our series on the nature of discipleship will continue to explore the two different views of discipleship espoused today and how they relate to the issue of salvation.

I. Disciples: Born or Made? The opening questions can be phrased simply: Are disciples born or made? In the first article of this series we concluded that a disciple is someone who is a learner or follower of a teacher or master. We learned that in relation to Jesus Christ, the term was used of those unsaved, those saved, and those saved who have made a serious commitment to Jesus as Lord and Master of their lives. What all three groups had in common that merited the designation disciples was that all were following Jesus Christ to some degree. Discipleship is therefore best understood as a journey, a direction, an orientation of one's life toward becoming like Christ. This can only be accomplished by following Christ. The most common use of the term in the Gospels was in reference to those believers who followed Christ wholeheartedly, especially those who were later called apostles. This fullest sense of discipleship is the focus of this second article. Are such committed disciples born or made? Is the call to salvation the same as the call to discipleship? We will examine specific calls to discipleship in the Gospels to see if they are calls to salvation or something more, that is, if they are calls to a life-commitment beyond the issue of one's eternal destiny. The calls we will consider are those that relate to the life of the Apostle Peter, for reasons which will be explained later. First we will summarize the two basic views about the relationship between the call to discipleship and the call to salvation.

A. View 1: Disciples Are Born This view claims the call to discipleship is the call to salvation. The calls are identical. The conditions of discipleship, hard as they may sound, are also the indispensable conditions of salvation. This teaching is basic to the Lordship Salvation position, which teaches that one cannot merely relate to Jesus as Savior, but one must also give total control of his or her life to Jesus as Lord and Master in order to be saved. The term disciple therefore emphasizes the obedience and "costliness" of salvation in contrast to the "cheap grace" purportedly found in "easy believism," which is the name given the opposing view (called here the Free Grace view). Likewise, the term follow denotes a commitment to faithfulness and obedience by which true believers can be identified. This view is set forth by a number of Bible teachers and

theologians. John MacArthur states, "The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience."¹ He adds,

Every Christian is a disciple. . . . Disciples are people who believe, whose faith motivates them to obey all Jesus commanded.² James G. Merritt likewise asserts, The fact is, Jesus sought more than a superficial following; he sought disciples. In short, the evangelistic call of Jesus was essentially a call to repentance and radical discipleship.³ James Montgomery Boice also argues that

...discipleship is not a supposed second step in Christianity, as if one first becomes a believer in Jesus and then, if he chooses, a disciple. >From the beginning, discipleship is involved in what it means to be a Christian.⁴ To support their views these proponents of commitment-salvation appeal to the early calls of Jesus to the first disciples, as we shall see.

Neglecting the demands of discipleship is considered by these and other Lordship teachers to be an error of the contemporary church. Modern evangelism (they claim) should include a call to follow (=submit and obey) in the proclamation of the Gospel.⁵ B. View 2: Disciples Are Made The opposing view, here called the Free Grace view for the sake of simplicity, holds that discipleship is a separate issue from salvation. This does not mean that committed discipleship cannot be a continuum originating with one's initial faith in Christ for salvation from sin. Obviously, discipleship should be the logical choice of those who truly understand the issues of salvation, and often it is. However, the call to salvation is distinct from the call to follow Christ in discipleship. The Grace Evangelical Society states this position in its purpose statement: "To promote the clear proclamation of God's free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, which is properly correlated with and distinguished from issues related to discipleship (emphasis added)."⁶ Authors such as Zane C. Hodges, Charles C. Ryrie, Robert N. Wilkin, and Roy B. Zuck are also careful to separate the call to salvation from the call to discipleship.⁷ In the remainder of this article, our examination of Christ's calls to discipleship will show that the "Disciples-Are-Made" view is more biblically informed. We will accomplish this by observing how Peter was made a disciple.

II. Peter as a Model Disciple When we examine the calls of Christ to discipleship in the Gospels, we find ourselves constantly crossing paths with one character in particular, the Apostle Peter. Though the calls to salvation and discipleship can be separated without focusing on the person of Peter, attention to this prominent disciple is helpful in forming a cohesive picture of the progression of discipleship. But a focus on Peter is motivated by more than pragmatic convenience; there is also a theological basis. Peter is presented by the Gospels as the model disciple with whom readers can identify as disciples themselves. This point can be argued from all the Gospels in their general presentation of Peter. Simon Peter was the prominent disciple. Not only is he always listed first (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16), but as the spokesman for the disciples as a group, he represents the consensus of the group's opinion of Jesus and His teaching (e.g., Matthew 16:15-16; Matthew 17:24; Mark 8:29; Mark 16:7; Luke 9:20; Luke 12:41; John 6:67-69). Peter is also given the privilege of being one of the three in Jesus' inner circle along with James and John (e.g., Matthew 17:1; Matthew 26:37; Mark 9:2; Mark 14:33, Luke 9:28).

We see Peter's role as the representative disciple most clearly in Matthew and Mark's presentation of him. In these Gospels Peter serves as the vehicle for Matthew and Mark's message and the point of identification with the readers in their discipleship. Michael J. Wilkins

notes Peter's prominence in Matthew:

Even as the disciples function in Matthew's gospel as an example, both positively and negatively, of what it means to be a disciple, so also the portrait of Simon Peter in Matthew's gospel provides a personalized example of discipleship for Matthew's church... Peter functions exemplarily in much the same way as does the group of disciples. While Matthew concentrates on the disciples as an exemplary group, Peter is seen as a 'typical' individual... The church would find much in common with Peter's typically human characteristics. He is much like any ordinary believer with his highs and lows, and he, therefore, becomes an example from whom the church can learn.⁸ A similar case can be made for the presentation of Peter in Mark as noted by Paul J. Achtemeier:

One must keep in mind that Peter may have representative value for Mark, so that he is not to be considered only as an individual. For instance, Mark may think of Peter as a representative of the disciple or of discipleship, both in his generosity and in his failings. As a disciple he is called to be a fisher of men, and he and his brother set an example in immediately leaving their nets and following Jesus (Mark 1:16-18), so that he can speak for the group when he says, "We have left everything and followed you" (Mark 10:28). Yet in his falling away at the time of the passion, he is also typical of the group (Mark 14:29-31). Moreover, if Peter is a typical disciple, since the disciples of Jesus are meant to serve as lessons for the readers of the Gospel, Peter may also be the lesson par excellence for Christians as to the demands of discipleship upon them.⁹

Peter's experiences encompass those of a typical believer. His life is presented from the time of initial faith and recognition of Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:40-42), through stages of development, to a fuller understanding of what Jesus' ministry encompassed. In the process, he precipitates Jesus' instruction on what it really means to be a committed disciple. Positively, Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God (Mark 8:27-29) is central to his role as a disciple. But on the negative side, so is his failure to comprehend Jesus' ministry in suffering and death (Mark 8:31-33). Peter's experiences of following Christ take all believers through their own failures and successes.

Peter's name change from Simon also has a representative function in the Gospels. Jesus' new name for him, Cephas in Aramaic or Petros in Greek, means "rock." In spite of his failures, Peter the Rock would represent discipleship. Carsten P. Thiede writes: The early Christians, and this includes the apostles and their pupils, could therefore look to Peter and his experience as a kind of model—Peter was the petros, the rock, not because of his strengths, but in spite of his weaknesses, "deputizing" for the weaknesses of them all.¹⁰ For these reasons, when we view the life of Peter, we see the life of a typical disciple as designed by God. This informs us about the nature of discipleship, when it begins, how it develops, and the end toward which it is directed. In short, when we study Peter's life we see the making of a disciple.

III. Peter as a Progressing Disciple When we study the life and progress of Peter in the Gospels, we find definite stages in his commitment of discipleship based on his responses to Jesus' calls to "follow" Him. As noted in the first article in this series, Jesus' call to "Follow Me" was a call to follow Him in a life of discipleship. The various calls to follow serve as a helpful framework in understanding the progression of discipleship or how a disciple is made.

A. Following in Salvation

Peter's first encounter with Christ is described in John 1:40-42. The setting for this meeting is Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 1:28).¹¹ Andrew, Peter's brother, first meets Jesus, then goes to find Peter. When Simon Peter meets Jesus, we have no record of his words or thoughts, only that Jesus changed his name from Simon to Cephas (=Peter, John 1:42). Whether Peter was saved here we do not know. But Jesus knew he would be saved and useful to Him. However, Andrew's faith¹² implies Peter's. We know that Peter is at least saved by the time of the wedding in Cana, for there we have the scriptural confirmation that "[Christ's] disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11). In neither John 1:1-51 nor John 2:1-25 is there any call for Peter to follow Christ as a disciple. Neither do we find conditions of commitment required by Christ nor any commitment expressed by Peter. A. B. Bruce notes the significance of Jesus' meeting in John 1:1-51 with those who would later become His disciples:

We have here to do not with any formal solemn call to the great office of the apostleship, or even with the commencement of an uninterrupted discipleship, but at the utmost with the beginnings of an acquaintance with and of faith in Jesus on the part of certain individuals who subsequently became constant attendants on His person, and ultimately apostles of His religion. Accordingly we find no mention made in the three first Gospels of the events here recorded.¹³ The encounter with Peter in John 1:1-51 clearly happened in the early phase of Jesus' ministry. Timing is important in understanding the significance of Jesus' later calls to follow. The story shows that God's first call to unbelievers is a call to salvation.

B. Following in Commitment The first call to Peter to follow in discipleship is issued in Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:14-20, in Galilee (Matthew 4:12, Matthew 4:18, Matthew 4:23, Mark 1:14, Mark 1:16, Mark 1:21). Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, to become "fishers of men." Is this episode also a call to salvation? Some of the Lordship Salvation school believe it is.

Commenting on this call, Boice assumes this interpretation to support his argument for commitment-salvation:

...discipleship is not a supposed second step in Christianity, as if one first becomes a believer in Jesus and then, if he chooses, a disciple. >From the beginning, discipleship is involved in what it means to be a Christian.¹⁴

There is no dispute that in these passages Jesus is calling Peter and the others to a further commitment of discipleship. The command "Follow Me" and the promise that they will become "fishers of men" correctly denote the obedience and submission essential to discipleship. However, there is no support for Boice's assumption that this encounter is either chronologically or theologically parallel with the first encounter of Jesus with Peter and the other disciples in John 1:15

Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:14-20 could not possibly be the same event described in John 1:35-42, which is clearly Jesus' first encounter with Peter and the other disciples. In John 1:1-51 the setting is Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 1:28), not Galilee, as in Matthew and Mark (cf. John 1:43).¹⁶ In John there is no mention of a seaside setting nor of fishing for men. Furthermore, Peter is brought to Jesus (John 1:41-42) rather than being already present as Jesus walked by (Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16). Finally, in the first chapter of John, Peter is obviously introduced to

Jesus for the first time, while Matthew and Mark's accounts report no introduction of the men to Jesus, and appear to assume a degree of familiarity with Jesus.

Many commentators agree that Matthew and Mark's accounts of Jesus' call to follow and become fishers of men presuppose the facts of the John 1:1-51 encounter.¹⁷ Since Peter was saved in John 1:1-51 or at latest by John 2:1-25 (see John 2:11), then the call to follow in Matthew and Mark cannot be a call to salvation. James Donaldson writes on the call to become fishers of men: The response of the disciples is not an act of faith in Jesus, but more significantly an act of obedience. Mark's Gospel issues no call to repentance here but only a call to discipleship.¹⁸

Hans Conzelmann makes the same distinction between salvation and discipleship in this narrative: "Jesus does not make this discipleship in the external sense a general condition for salvation."¹⁹ Even A. W. Pink, a strong Lordship Salvation teacher, agrees: "John tells us of the conversion of these disciples, whereas Mark (as also Matthew and Luke) deals with their call to service..." (emphasis his).²⁰ After salvation, Jesus calls those who have believed to a life of evangelism.

C. Following in Obedience

Another time we find Peter following Christ is in the seaside account described in Luke 5:1-11. After an unfruitful night of fishing, Jesus finds Peter washing his nets. He tells him to launch the boat and let down the nets. Peter objects, but obeys, and catches a huge haul of fish. The results produce in Peter a broken spirit as he now learns to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus tells Peter, "From now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10), and the text notes that Peter and his companions "forsook all and followed Him" (Luke 5:11). The story has many similarities to the seaside call in Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45, and not surprisingly, some have interpreted it as a parallel account. Such an interpretation adds fuel to the Lordship Salvation fire, for now they have Christ calling Peter to salvation in such a way that it includes Christ's lordship over him (v 8) and the forsaking of everything. For example, Merritt writes, "the evangelistic call of Jesus was essentially a call to repentance and radical discipleship." He adds, "the call of Christ to discipleship is a multi-faceted call which demands a singular commitment of faith and obedience." Merritt next argues from Luke 5:1-11 that part of obedience is the evangelistic task. He then states the inevitable conclusion from his interpretation of Luke 5:1-11 : To be a disciple one must follow Jesus. But to follow Jesus, one will become a fisher of men. Therefore, "if you are not fishing, you are not following!" The call to discipleship is indeed a call to evangelism.²¹

Merritt's equation of this episode with Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45 and his interpretation of them as a call to salvation virtually forces him to include evangelism as a condition of salvation. One might wonder, since Christ's lordship is in view, why stop at evangelism?

Merritt's conclusion comes from confusing the calls of Christ. However, just as John 1:1-51 was shown to be different from Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45, so also Luke 5:1-39 can be shown to be different from Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45. Admittedly, there are some similarities, such as the seaside setting in Galilee, the context of fishing, and the immediate response of the fishermen who follow Jesus. However, there are many differences. For example, in Luke there is a multitude pressing Jesus as He stands on the shore, while in Matthew and Mark He is apparently alone and walking. Also, in Luke the fishermen are out of their boats washing their nets, but in Matthew and Mark they are in their boats casting their nets. In Luke Jesus gets into one of the boats for a fishing

excursion, but in Matthew and Mark it is obvious He does none of this. Plummer recognizes some similarities, but separates Luke's account from Matthew and Mark's:

Against these similarities however, we have to set the differences, chief among which is the miraculous draught of fishes which Mt. and Mk. omit. Could Peter have failed to include this in his narrative? And would Mk. have omitted it, if the Petrine tradition had contained it? It is easier to believe that some of the disciples were called more than once, and that their abandonment of their original mode of life was gradual: so that Mk. and Mt. may relate one occasion and Lk. another. Even after the Resurrection Peter speaks quite naturally of "going a fishing" (John 21:3), as if it was still at least an occasional pursuit.²²

Plummer's observation fits the model of discipleship proposed in this article. In a progression of commitment, a disciple requires continual challenges or calls to become more of a disciple. This progression is seen in some of the details of Luke's account. For example, Jesus does not actually call Peter to follow here, yet Peter follows. Evidently Peter already knew the Lord's will, for earlier Jesus did actually call him to follow (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:14-20). For Peter, the question was one of total submission to that call. Indeed, Luke notes that in this instance he "forsook all," while Matthew and Mark both note that he only left the boat and his father. Jesus' words also seem to mark a progression, for while in Matthew the promise is "I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19) and in Mark "I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17), in Luke Jesus moves from the future promise to the initiation of a present fulfillment when He says, "From now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10). Jesus could say this now that Peter had learned the lesson of submission and obedience. "It was one thing to call the four apostles, it was quite another thing to demonstrate to them the power of the gospel they were to handle as fishers of men."²³ The significance of this episode in the progression of Peter's discipleship is noted by Richard D. Calenberg: This event seems to mark an important step in the process and progress of commitment to Christ in discipleship on the part of Peter, James and John. Never again will they return to fishing until after the Passion. Peter, in particular, will faithfully follow Christ through every experience and his presence is repeatedly noted by the Gospel writers. Not until the events immediately preceding the crucifixion will his commitment to discipleship falter.²⁴

It should be no surprise that Peter had returned to his fishing in Luke 5:1-39, for as Calenberg and Plummer both noted, we see he does this again in John 21:1-25. A number of other commentators have noted this obvious progression in discipleship in the Gospels.²⁵ As we examine the calls of Christ to discipleship in Matthew 4:1-25 and Mark 1:1-45, and later in Luke 5:1-39, we find no mention of the Gospel, no call to believe unto salvation. The calls were, after all, to become fishers of men as they followed Christ in obedience. Peter initially followed with some enthusiasm (Matthew 4:1-25, Mark 1:1-45), but not with the submission and obedience he finally manifests in Luke 5:1-11. Jesus calls those who are his disciples to submissive obedience.

D. Following in Sacrifice

Now that Peter has learned his first lesson in submission and obedience, Jesus advances him in the school of discipleship with a lesson on what it really means to be a disciple. On the occasion of Peter's climactic confession (Matthew 16:13 f.; Mark 8:27 f.; Luke 9:18 f.), Jesus instructs all the disciples in the conditions or cost of continuing in discipleship. Though all the disciples are addressed, Peter becomes the principal character in precipitating this instruction. The interesting

juxtaposition of Jesus addressing Peter as "Blessed" (Matthew 16:17) and then as "Satan" (Matthew 16:23) shows that, though Peter was saved, he was limited in his understanding of suffering in relation to discipleship. He is praised for his proper understanding of who Jesus is, but rebuked for his lack of understanding about what Jesus must do in following the Father's will. Peter's incomplete comprehension of Christ's submission to God's will indicates a parallel deficient comprehension about what it means to be a disciple submitted to God's will in the fullest sense. This prepares the way for Christ's well-known instructions about the cost of discipleship. The many conditions listed in Matthew 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-38; and Luke 9:23-27 (cf. also Luke 14:25-33) are considered conditions for salvation by Lordship Salvation teachers.²⁶ In the next article of this series, we will show how each of the specific conditions cannot refer to salvation. Here we make only some general observations in relation to Peter. First, the conditions are spoken to him as a believer. As shown, his faith is affirmed by the Scripture (John 2:11), and he has received the approbation of Jesus for his confession of faith (Matthew 16:17-19). Peter has been following Jesus since the two seaside calls and is included in the "disciples" whom Jesus addresses (Matthew 16:21, Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:33-34). What sense does it make to have Jesus telling Peter and the disciples—men who were already believers—how to be saved?

Second, the language Jesus uses to speak of the ultimate goal of the conditions is language not used of salvation. We have already seen that in the progression of Peter's relationship to Christ, the call to "follow" is a call to discipleship, not salvation.²⁷ In giving the conditions of discipleship, Jesus again uses the term "Follow Me" (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). Jesus also says that anyone who does not meet His conditions "cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-33). Clearly the issue is discipleship and following, not faith and salvation. Another important term used in these passages is "come after Me" (erchomai plus opisō) found in all three Synoptic Gospels for those who would meet the conditions of discipleship (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; Luke 14:27). This term is significant because it is seen here as essentially equivalent to "follow" and the idea of discipleship. Perhaps more significant is that it is different from the language Jesus uses to invite people to salvation, which is "come to Me" (erchomai plus pros).²⁸

Jesus was not telling Peter how to be saved, but what it means to be a disciple in the fullest sense. Peter was already a disciple, but every disciple is challenged to a fuller commitment in his walk with the Lord. If the challenge is rejected, the believer has, in effect, ceased following. For Peter, who does not fully comprehend Jesus' obedience to the Father, it is time to challenge his incomplete comprehension of discipleship with specific conditions. Obedient disciples can expect Jesus to challenge them with a call to the deepest sacrificial commitment.

E. Following in Failure The next stage of Peter's discipleship finds him faltering in following the Lord. In the upper room on the night of the final Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus told Peter, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward" (John 13:36). Peter, who still trusted in his own strength to enable him to follow Christ, objected to the pronouncement (John 13:35). Jesus, of course, was predicting Peter's infamous three-fold denial during His arrest (John 13:38). The "now... afterward" contrast shows this to be a temporary interruption due to impending and difficult circumstances. The fulfillment of our Lord's prediction is in John 18:15-27. In this account, there is positive identification of Peter as still a disciple. The one accompanying Peter to the courtyard of the High Priest, usually assumed to be the disciple John,²⁹ is called "another disciple" (John 18:15) or "the other disciple" (John 18:16),³⁰ thus

identifying Peter as a disciple to the reader. Not only that, but it is said that Peter "followed Jesus" (John 18:15). What we have, then, is a picture of a disciple under great pressure in his progress of following the Lord. The denial itself also makes Peter's discipleship the issue. The servant girl asks him, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" Peter denied he was a disciple (John 18:17). Meanwhile, the reader is told that the high priest was asking Jesus "about His disciples" (John 18:19). Then Peter is asked again by the servants and officers, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" Peter denied it again (John 18:25). While Peter is denying the fact that he is a disciple of Jesus, the reader is shown that, to a certain degree, Peter really is following. After all, he did follow Christ thus far, in contrast to most of the other disciples. It is in this context that he failed Christ and came face to face with his own weakness. Are we to take this interruption in Peter's following as an interruption in his salvation? There is no biblical support for such a view. The most reasonable interpretation posits a progression in Peter's following. Though Peter ceases to follow for a short time, he does not really cease to be a disciple. Jesus' promise to Peter remains: "You shall follow Me afterward" (John 13:36). It was not his discipleship that failed, but his courage. The disciple who is progressing may falter during tests of his faith. Jesus allows His followers to fail in order to show them their weaknesses and so that "afterward" they will trust in His power instead of their own.

F. Following in Service The last stage in the progression of Peter's discipleship occurs after the resurrection when Jesus appears to Peter and six other "disciples" in Galilee (John 21:1-2). Peter had returned to his familiar activity of fishing. It is certainly no coincidence that Peter's activity of fishing forms the backdrop for a further challenge to discipleship. In contrast to Luke 5:1-39, however, Peter does not object to the Lord's command to let down the net on the right side of the boat (Luke 21:6), demonstrating that he has learned the lesson of obedience.

Jesus' calls to "Follow Me" (Luke 21:19, Luke 21:22) come both after the three-fold commissioning of Peter to a shepherding ministry and after a description of how Peter would die (Luke 21:18). The dialogue shows that Peter is now restored in his relationship with the Lord. Now that Peter is resigned to God's will to the fullest degree and has forsaken self-reliance, Jesus is free to tell Peter how he will die. There is no confident denial of the revelation here as earlier when Christ spoke of His own death. Peter now understands that discipleship means laying down one's life. When Jesus concludes the revelation and says to Peter, "Follow Me," He is calling him to minister and to die in his service to others. Compared to Christ's earlier calls to follow, Westcott notes,

Now to "follow Christ" required further the perception of His course; the spiritual discernment by which His movements can still be discovered; and yet further the readiness to accept martyrdom as the end.³¹

Surely to Peter the words had more significance than ever. At each stage in the life of a disciple the call to follow has progressively deeper significance.

Jesus called Peter to follow a second time in this interchange (Luke 21:22). This second time emphasizes the single-minded devotion necessary to follow Christ in ministry. Peter had expressed concern about the future of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (almost certainly John). Jesus told Peter that John's future should not concern him, but told him, "You follow Me." The rebuke and the emphatic pronoun "You" (sy) indicates that Jesus wants each disciple to follow in his own way. That is, the Lord's specific will for each disciple must be followed regardless of what

others do.

It should now be obvious that the call to follow cannot be the same as a call to salvation. Such a thought is totally foreign to this last segment of the Gospels' record of Peter's life. What we have observed is that Peter was called to follow throughout his life and that all the calls were after he had believed. In John 21:1-25 he is called to serve Christ and to follow Christ's specific will for his life even at the certain cost of that life. Jesus calls each of His disciples to follow in a specific and unique ministry.

IV. Conclusion

Disciples are made, not born. We have seen this in the life of Peter. Furthermore, the recurrent calls of Christ to Peter to follow in his life show that there is a sense in which a disciple can always become more of a disciple. The call to follow persists throughout the life of a disciple. In Peter's life we see a funnel effect. The progressive calls to follow begin with a general direction and commitment, but become more and more specific in what that commitment entails. Each time the disciple is called to follow, new significance is attached. With each call, the disciple is challenged to a deeper commitment and a greater sacrifice. This supports our understanding of discipleship as a direction or orientation, not a state. It is a committed and progressive following of Jesus Christ as Master. Anywhere on one's journey toward becoming like Christ one can be called a disciple, even in the midst of a temporary failure. It seems reasonable to state that anyone who rejects the challenge to commit himself to Christ ceases to follow and removes himself from the path of discipleship. To confuse the call to discipleship with the call to salvation is a simplistic and confusing approach to the Scriptures and real-life experience. It is disturbing to take the conclusions of the Lordship position to their inevitable end. If the deeper relationship of discipleship is not distinguished from salvation, then many or most professing evangelicals—including Lordship Salvationists—are lost. Hull shows the incongruity of such a view with reality when he speaks of true disciples:

If disciples are born not made, while these characteristics would take time to develop, they would develop 100 percent of the time in the truly regenerate. Therefore, every single Christian would be a healthy, reproducing believer. If people did not reflect the disciple's profile, then they would not be Christians.

If disciples are born and not made, non-Christians dominate the evangelical church. A generous estimate would find no more than 25 percent of evangelicals meeting Christ's standard for a disciple. As stated earlier, only 7 percent have been trained in evangelism, and only 2 percent have introduced another to Christ. By Christ's definition, disciples reproduce themselves through evangelism. If one takes the "disciples are born and not made" theology and joins it to the definition of a disciple given by Jesus and then adds the objective facts concerning today's evangelical church, the results are alarming. At least 75 percent of evangelicals are not Christians, because they just don't measure up to Christ's standards of what it means to be a disciple.³²

Lordship Salvation teaching has imposed a standard for salvation that most professing Christians cannot meet. This by itself does not make it wrong. But it does make it dubious in the extreme. The issues of salvation and discipleship must remain distinct if one is to appreciate the wonders of each. The call to salvation through faith alone with no other conditions beautifies the doctrine of

grace. The call to discipleship with its hard conditions makes the Christian life more meaningful and purposeful. Not surprisingly then, Lordship Salvation theology is detrimental to the Church. As Hull writes, The "disciples are born and not made" theology has many harmful effects. Some quarters accept it because they have not stood that theology toe to toe with Jesus' definitions. When it does stand toe to toe, it creates a gospel of works. It adds to the requirements for salvation. Not only does it require faith in Christ, but commitment to the disciple's profile is required. Unless you are willing to commit to world evangelism, labor in the harvest field, placing Christ before everything in your life, then in the words of Jesus, "You cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:25-35); therefore you are denied salvation.³³

Disciples are made, not born. When we understand this, our Gospel remains truly of grace. Then as those saved by grace, we are motivated to cooperate with God and commit and submit ourselves to His purpose of conforming us to His Son, our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

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Footnotes:

1 John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 21. See also 29-31, 196-98.

2 *Ibid.*, 196.

3 James G. Merritt, "Evangelism and the Call of Christ," in *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century: The Critical Issues*, ed. Thomas S. Ranier (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989), 145.

4 James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 16.

5 E.g., Richard P. Belcher, *A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Salvation Controversy* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990), 94-95; Boice, *Discipleship*, 13-16; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 15-17; John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1958), 108.

6 The purpose statement can be found in past issues of the newsletter, *The Grace Evangelical Society News*.

7 Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989), 67-76; *The Gospel Under Siege*, 2nd ed. revised and enlarged (Redención Viva, 1992), 39-50; Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 103-14; Robert N. Wilkin, "'Soul Salvation,' Part 3: Saving Your Soul by Doing Good—James 1:21," *The Grace Evangelical Society News* 7 (February 1992), 2, and "Part 4: Gaining by Losing—Matthew 16:24-28" (March-April 1992), 2; Roy B. Zuck, "Cheap Grace?" *Kindred Spirit* 13 (Summer 1989), 7.

8 Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 185. See also his study, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Mathetes*, *Novum Testamentum Supplement* 59 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); and Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple-Apostle-Martyr. A Historical and Theological Essay*, trans. Floyd Filson, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 25-33; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 332,334; Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Figure of Peter in

Matthew's Gospel as a Theological Problem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 72, 80.

9 Paul J. Achtemeier, "Peter in the Gospel of Mark" in *Peter in the New Testament*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, and John Reumann (London: Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, 1974), 62. See also W. S. Vorster, "Characterization of Peter in the Gospel of Mark" *Neotestamentica* 21(1987): 74.

10 Carsten P. Thiede, *Simon Peter: >From Galilee to Rome* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988; first published in 1986 by The Paternoster Press), 36. See also Gundry, *Matthew*, 334.

11 Suggestions for the location of this "Bethany" (MjT and NU text reading; "Bethabara" in the TR is least preferred) vary from the Bethany near Jerusalem to the region of Batanea in the Transjordan and to the north. For the purpose of our study, we only note that the setting of this encounter is not in Galilee. For more discussion, see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1991), 146-47; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 142.

12 The account of John 1:1-51 leads us to believe that Andrew believed in Christ: (1) He followed John the Baptist (John 1:35) and evidently believed John's witness about Christ (John 1:36-37); (2) He followed Christ (John 1:37, John 1:39-40); (3) He believed Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:41; cf. John 20:30-31); (4) In the following story, Philip and Nathaniel obviously believe (John 1:45, John 1:49-50); (5) Andrew's faith is confirmed in John 2:11.

13 Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), 1.

14 Boice, *Discipleship*, 16.

15 *Ibid.*, 16-17.

16 See footnote 11 for a discussion on the location of this Bethany.

17 See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 245-46; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 169-70; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London: Robert Scott, Paternoster Row, 1909), 48; Herman N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, trans. Ray Togtman, *The Bible Student's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 77; Frederick Louis Godet, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), 1:330.

18 James Donaldson, "'Called to Follow': A Twofold Experience of Discipleship in Mark," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 5 (February 1975), 69.

19 Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus*, trans. J. Raymond Lord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 35; in agreement, see Ridderbos, *Matthew*, 77.

20 A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 4 vols. (Ohio: Cleveland Bible Truth Depot, 1929), 1:62-63. Jesus' call to Philip to "Follow Me" (John 1:43) may seem incongruous with the argument thus far, as Jesus' encounter with Philip in John 1:43-45 appears to be His first. However, there is much evidence in the passage that Jesus was calling him to discipleship, not to salvation. Hendriksen notes: "We may probably assume that Andrew and Peter had told their friend and townsman about Jesus" (William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, *New Testament Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953], 1:108). See also John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospels: John* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), 45; and R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 161. Indeed, John makes a special note that Philip was from the same city as Peter and Andrew (1:44). Also, while 1:43 says Jesus found Philip, in 1:45 Philip says he found the Messiah, indicating a previous knowledge, expectation, and even faith. It may also be possible that in 1:43 Jesus simply meant accompany Me on this journey" (so Godet, *John*, 1:331) in much the same sense as He told the first two disciples, "Come and see" (1:39).

21 Merritt, "Call of Christ," *Evangelism*, 145-46.

22 Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 147. In agreement, see Lenski, *Matthew*, 168-72, and *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 276-77; William F. Arndt, *Luke*, *Concordia Classic Commentary Series* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 155-56; Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, revised ed., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 124; Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), 181; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 279-80.

23 Lenski, *Luke*, 277.

24 Richard D. Calenberg, "The New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship" (Th. D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 121.

25 See Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 245-47; Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 181; Arndt, *Luke*, 156. For other excellent presentations of this idea, see Bruce, *Training*, 11-12, and Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 48-49.

26 E.g., Boice, *Discipleship*, 35-44, 117; Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976), 73-75; John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1991), 253; MacArthur, *The Gospel*, 196-202; J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 72-73; John R. W. Stott, "Must Christ Be Lord to Be Savior?—Yes," *Eternity* 10 (September 1959), 18.

27 See also the study of this term in my first article, "Coming to Terms with Discipleship," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 5 (Spring 1992), 39-41.

28 Cf. John 5:40, John 6:35, John 6:37, John 6:4-45, John 6:65, John 7:37.

29 See the discussions in Carson, John, 472-73, and Morris, John, 752-53.

30 The Majority Text and the Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies Text support the reading "the other" (ho allos) in V 15 as well as v 16, but with no consequence to our point.

31 B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), 304.

32 Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 55.

33 *Ibid.*

01.19. Lordship Salvation's Good Intentions Are Not Enough - Grace in Focus, Oct. 1991.

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Lordship Salvation's Good Intentions Are Not Enough - Grace in Focus, Oct. 1991

Synopsis: In trying to solve the problem of less-than-committed believers, Lordship Salvation creates a bigger problem of confusing the gospel and robbing Christians of their assurance.

I came close to calling this article, "Why I Could Almost Believe in Lordship Salvation."

What appeals to me about the Lordship Salvation position is that it may often be motivated by good intentions to solve a very real problem in the church.

Lordship Salvation is concerned with the serious problem of too many worldly Christians. Who can argue with Lordship teachers who claim that many who call themselves Christians are weak and worldly? We all agree that many Christians do not live up to what they profess to believe. We all want to see more consistency between lip service and life service.

Behind Lordship Salvation is the stated intention of trying to produce committed Christians. Again, who could argue against that? Like most pastors, I long for deeper commitment for my people. What a luxury it would be to see the people of my flock always living obediently, hungering for the Word, actively witnessing, and sacrificing all for the cause of Christ.

However, in spite of these good intentions, I am not swayed by the Lordship message. I recently completed several years of intense study on the subject which resulted in my writing a doctoral dissertation that evaluates and responds to the Lordship arguments. I am convinced that we should not question their intentions, only the solution they offer. The solution they prescribe for the problem is to present a gospel that gets a commitment to serve Christ "up front" before salvation. But preaching commitment of all of one's life creates more problems than it attempts to solve.

One problem with this approach is that it asks of an unregenerate sinner a very "Christian" decision. Not having experienced God's grace, how can we expect an unsaved person to respond in gratitude, submission, surrender, and commitment? We must preach commitment, but only on the basis of the grace that brings salvation. In Romans 12:1 Paul appeals to Christians to surrender their lives on the basis of God's merciful dealings with them in salvation.

Another problem with the commitment gospel is that it detracts from the only proper object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ and His work on the Cross. Instead of looking to Him to fulfill His promises, those who are taught that commitment is needed will likely look to the amount of their commitment for assurance of salvation. They will live in doubt about whether they have committed themselves enough.

Though they have good intentions, Lordship Salvation teachers have oversimplified the problem of worldly Christians. Some who profess to be Christians have never been saved because the true

Gospel was never made clear to them and thus they have never believed it. Others who truly are believers nonetheless struggle with tenacious sins and powerful worldly temptations. Still others while truly saved have yet "to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18) through their study of the Scriptures. The best way to help worldly Christians is to clearly preach and teach the Gospel (not to add tougher requirements) and to lead them into a life of committed discipleship. When people understand and accept God's grace in the Gospel, they not only obtain salvation, but they also gain the motivation and power to live up to their new position (Titus 2:12; 2 Peter 1:3). This is the strategy Paul used with the Galatians. He did not question their salvation or make it more difficult to assume the title Christian. He simply clarified the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith (Galatians 2:16-21, Galatians 3:1-26).

I know a woman who went to her doctor for a health problem. With good intentions, the doctor prescribed some medicine that almost killed her!

Lordship teachers may have good intentions, but that is not enough. They have misdiagnosed the core problem, and therefore they prescribe the wrong medicine. The result can be hazardous to all who are influenced by such malpractice.

God's grace is sufficient both to save people and to bring them to godliness. The Gospel of grace is the only way to make good intentions have good results.

01.20. Does Philippians 1:6 Teach Perseverance? - Grace in Focus, Feb. 1991

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing Does Php 1:6 Teach Perseverance? - Grace in Focus, Feb. 1991

Synopsis: This verse may not mean what most people think it means. A closer look at the language helps with a bibilcally and theologically consistent interpretation.

[I am] confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Jerry and Stevie were teenage friends of mine. Both became addicted to drugs, joined a Christian rehabilitation program, were saved and stopped doing drugs. Through this program they grew some and share their testimony with many churches before finally returning to the neighborhood to witness to me and others.

However, with little guidance or follow-up, both eventually returned to the only life they knew and died drug-related deaths. Did they die Christians? I think they did. I heard their testimony of faith, saw their good works before they "backslid," and observed the conversions among their families and friends after their deaths.

Still, some would say that they could not have been Christians because they did not persevere in good works and godly living until the end of their lives. The first verse they would probably cite for support is Php 1:6 where Paul says to that church. "being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Does this verse teach the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? The first question to answer is what Paul meant by "good work." The answer is in the context. Paul is recognizing their "fellowship in the gospel" (Php 1:5). The word fellowship (koinonia) has the basic meaning of communion or something shared in common. What was it the Philippian believers shared with Paul? Foremost in Paul's mind, and really the occasion for his writing, is their financial sharing (Php 4:15-18). Epaphroditus had delivered the Philippians' gift and now Paul was sending him back with a "thank you note" and some information about his circumstances. In fact, in Php 4:15 Paul used the verbal form of koinonia when he said, "no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving except you only." The noun koinonia is actually translated "contribution" in other New Testament passages (Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 2 Corinthians 9:13; Hebrews 13:6).

Therefore, the "good work" of which Paul speaks is not sanctification in general. It is the Philippians' fellowship in the Gospel through giving. To consider this verse a promise that all Christians will persevere in a godly lifestyle ignores the occasion, the context, and Paul's point. First, he is not addressing all Christians, but the Philippian believers specifically. Second, Paul is not speaking about lifestyle, but about the Philippians' support of his ministry. Third, he is not making a promise, but is only expressing his confident feelings.

Paul is confident that God will "complete" or carry through the impact of their support as its effects are multiplied in ministry to others until the return of Christ. As a pastor, I have learned that if a person attends our church several times in a row, supports us financially, and volunteers to help out, I can be confident that God will continue to work in them to use them with us. But this is different from a guarantee they will always be faithful, and certainly gives me no right to make a statement about all Christians everywhere. The fact is, Paul knew that all Christians do not persevere in godliness and righteous behavior until the end. He reminded the Corinthians that there were some in their church who had died from abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:30). Elsewhere in the Bible we find that a believer can persist in sin such that it leads to his or her death (James 5:20; 1 John 5:16). I think this explains what happened to Jerry and Stevie.

God works in believers to produce good works and progressively sanctify them, but the results are not always measurable and observable. Furthermore, His work is only carried out in concurrence and cooperation with the individual's will (cf. Php 2:11-12). Knowing these things, let us be careful not to use Php 1:6 to condemn those who may genuinely be God's children. In reality, there are Christians who struggle with lifelong bad habits and weaknesses of will and discipline. There should be room in God's family for people like Jerry and Stevie.

01.21. The Grace Awakening by Charles R. Swindoll - A Review - Grace in Focus, Dec. 1990

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing The Grace Awakening by Charles R. Swindoll - A Review - Grace in Focus, Dec. 1990

Synopsis: A short review of this very important book. It will help people obtain a grace perspective.

Grace is always refreshing. A book about grace is a refreshing hook. Swindoll has probably written his best work and made his most important contribution to modern Christianity with the writing of this book. The Grace Awakening (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990., 311 pp.) is appropriately titled.

If you are not already aware of man's natural aversion to grace and experiencing it in your contact with others, then Chuck Swindoll will convince you of this perpetual problem that plagues the church. Legalism (from cultic to Christian forms) and a judgmental spirit show the great need for a grace awakening in modern Christianity. Understandably, natural man does not know grace, but it is tragic indeed that Christians also have such a misshapen idea of this concept.

Swindoll meets the enemies of grace head on without wavering and, of course, with grace. While attacking legalism, he retreats enough to deal with objections against the liberty (which opponents call license) that grace brings. His applications of grace to how we see ourselves and others, to our marriages, and to our ministries are expertly done and valuable.

It is the nature of grace that it changes and transforms. This book will awaken you to God's amazing grace, which will, in turn, shape your life and ministry. I highly recommend that you read it.

01.22. The Voice Still Lives - Grace in Focus, Apr. 1989

GraceLife Articles - Dr. Charlie Bing The Voice Still Lives - Grace in Focus, Apr. 1989

Synopsis: A tribute to Bible teacher John Vernon McGee and his passion for a clear gospel.

Ten years ago as my new wife and I cruised the backwoods of a frighteningly different Caribbean island on our honeymoon, we reached for the rental car radio to try to find the comfort of a Christian broadcast. The first voice we heard made us smile with relief for it was the unmistakably familiar Southern drawl of Dr. J. Vernon McGee on his Thru the Bible broadcast. The voice is no more. On December 1, 1988 Dr. McGee succumbed to heart problems and slipped into the presence of the Lord.

John Vernon McGee was born in Hillsboro, Texas in 1904. He completed his educational and ministerial training with Th.M. and Th.D. degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary. After pastoring churches in Georgia and Texas, he moved to California where he eventually served for 21 years as pastor of the Church of the Open Door in downtown Los Angeles.

It was during this pastorate that he began his daily radio broadcasts which grew to what are now over 1200 broadcasts a day in the United States and Canada. Dr. McGee's down-home common sense Bible teaching is also translated into 35 languages around the world. It remains one of the world's most popular Bible teaching ministries on radio.

Notably, Dr. McGee was a strong advocate of the grace gospel and a defender of its purity. Listen to his words from the June 1988 Thru the Bible Radio newsletter:

Every Christian should commit his life to Christ. However, no unsaved person is asked to commit his life to Christ.... God has only one question to ask the unsaved: "What will you do with My Son who died for you?" If you are unsaved, you are not asked to keep the Mosaic law. You are not asked to do anything. You are asked to believe God and trust Christ who did it all for your salvation. . . . You are saved by faith, faith plus nothing--not even commitment. (Italics his.)

Dr. McGee viewed Lordship Salvation as a dangerous threat to the gospel. He preferred to label it "Commitment Salvation." Upon reflection, I think this is a superior term in many ways: it focuses the issue on the response of the unsaved person to the gospel; it demands a definition of how much commitment is necessary; and it prevents the charge that opponents of Lordship Salvation do not care about the Lordship of Christ. I think all defenders of the free grace gospel would do well to follow Dr. McGee's lead in calling Lordship Salvation what it really is--Commitment Salvation.

Today I received the latest Thru the Bible Radio newsletter which assured listeners that Dr. McGee's broadcasts will continue with pre-recorded messages well into the future. The voice still lives.

02.00. Grace Notes

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02.01. The Condition for Salvation in John's Gospel

GraceNotes - no. 1 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Condition for Salvation in John's Gospel

John is the only book in the Bible that claims it was written for the express purpose of bringing people to eternal salvation. Its purpose statement in John 20:30-31 says, And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Therefore, we should begin with John to understand how to be saved and examine it closely to discover the condition for salvation.

How the condition is presented The purpose statement itself says if we believe we have eternal life. The verb believe is used 98 times in John as the condition for salvation. This compares to only 34 times in the other Gospels and 116 times in the rest of the New Testament. The consistent result of believing is salvation. When one believes, one can know that he/ she has eternal life as a present possession (John 5:24; John 9:38). The figures of speech used to picture belief in John (receive, look, hear, enter, feed, come) denote receptivity, agreement, or trust. All are essentially simple or passive activities. None communicates the idea of merit, work, effort, or achievement.

How the condition is not presented

There are no qualifiers used with believe, such as really believe, truly believe, or genuinely believe. There is only one kind of belief.

There are no other conditions mentioned in John, such as repentance, surrender, commitment, or obedience.

Conclusion

We are saved when we simply believe (trust in, accept as true for myself) that Jesus is God's Son, the Savior from our sins. Salvation is absolutely free and apart from any condition of merit to earn it.

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02.02. Faith and Works in James 2:14

GraceNotes - no. 2 by Dr. Charlie Bing Faith and Works in James 2:14 Does James 2:14 teach that works are a necessary component for salvation? Many would answer that James is not saying works are a necessary requirement for salvation, but a necessary result of salvation. Others object that this still makes salvation contingent upon works. How can this passage be reconciled to salvation by grace through faith alone as Paul teaches in Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-21 and Ephesians 2:1-22? Some observations follow:

There is every indication that the readers were Christians. They were born from above (Ephesians 1:18), possessed faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:1), and called brethren (Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 1:19, Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 2:14, Ephesians 3:1, Ephesians 4:11, Ephesians 5:7, Ephesians 5:10, Ephesians 5:12, Ephesians 5:19). The hypothetical “someone” in James 2:14 is identified as “one of you” in James 2:16. James assumes there may be individuals among his Christian readers who can have faith without works. The context is bracketed by the theme of judgment (James 2:13, James 3:1). The only judgment of Christians is the judgment seat of Christ, which is based on the believer’s works or lack of works (1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10). This fits James’s concern exactly. The word “saved” is often used of Christians who are delivered from some undesirable fate (1 Corinthians 5:5). James uses this word of a Christian’s possible fate in James 1:21, James 5:15, and James 5:20. It is used in James 2:14-26 to refer to a Christian delivered from an undesirable fate at the judgment seat of Christ such as having his works burned (1 Corinthians 3:12-15) and losing his reward (2 John 1:7-8). Thus the profit James speaks of is not salvation, but advantages accrued in this life and the next.

James is not concerned with the reality of his readers’ faith, but the quality (James 1:3, James 1:6, James 2:1, James 5:15) and usefulness (James 1:12, James 1:26, James 2:14, James 2:16, James 2:20 [NASB]) of their faith. James is not saying faith will manifest itself in works, but that without works faith is useless or unprofitable in this life and the next. James’ main concern is that his readers become “doers of the word” (James 1:22) which is the same as being a “doer of the work” who will “be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25). For example, faith that perseveres in trials earns a reward from God (James 1:3-12); and faith that is merciful to others receives God’s mercy at the judgment seat of Christ (James 2:8-13). But faith that does not work is “useless” towards these blessings and “useless” in helping others (James 1:26, James 2:20 in some versions). The word “dead” should therefore be understood as useless or unprofitable rather than non-existent. In James 2:19 the faith of demons also shows the uselessness of faith without works. Their faith could not save them anyway, because it is only a faith in monotheism, not Jesus Christ. The point of their mention is that because they only tremble, they do not do any good works to alleviate a fearful judgment. Their faith is useless to them.

Many recognize that when James speaks of being “justified by works” (James 2:21, James 2:24-25) he is not speaking of the imputed justification which saves us eternally as Paul uses the term (Romans 3:24; Romans 4:5). This would be a contradiction in the Bible. James is speaking of

a vindication before others. Paul even recognizes this use of the word “justify” in Romans 4:2. There are two kinds of justification in the Bible. One concerns practical righteousness that vindicates us before people. The other concerns judicial righteousness that vindicates us before God. James obviously uses the practical sense because Abraham was judicially justified in Genesis 15:6 (Genesis 2:23) before he offered Isaac in Genesis 22:1-24 (James 2:21). His vindication by others is seen when they call him “the friend of God” (James 2:23). Thus Abraham’s faith was “made perfect” or mature by this demonstration of his faith (James 2:22). In James 2:26 James is not saying that faith invigorates works, but that works invigorates faith. It is works which makes faith useful, just as the spirit makes the body useful. The issue is not whether faith exists in a person, but how faith becomes profitable or useful to a Christian.

Conclusion This passage in James is written to Christians to encourage them to do good works which will make their faith mature and profitable to them and to others. There is no contradiction between James and Paul. When Paul speaks of justification through faith alone, he is speaking of judicial righteousness before God. When James speaks of justification by a faith that works, he is speaking of a practical righteousness displayed before other people. In Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-21, Paul is discussing how to obtain a new life in Christ. In James, James is discussing how to make that new life profitable.

If this passage is taken to mean that one must demonstrate a “real” salvation through works, then works unavoidably becomes necessary for salvation—a contradiction of Ephesians 2:8-9. Also, there are no criteria mentioned for exactly what kind or how much work verifies salvation. This opens the door to subjectivism and undermines the objective basis of assurance—the promise of God’s Word that all who believe in Christ’s work will be saved.

02.03. Motivations for Serving God

GraceNotes - no. 3 by Dr. Charlie Bing Motivations for Serving God

Why do we as Christians serve God? Why should we serve God? Many have probably never paused to consider their motives. While we do not need to understand our motives in order to serve God or grow in godliness, the more we are aware of them, the better we will be able to serve God as He deserves. Motivations are often hard to discern and they sometimes overlap, but it is clear from the Bible that Christians can serve from either worthy or unworthy motives.

Illegitimate unbiblical motivations

Some motivations are not worthy of God or Christians. Though service may result from those who are improperly motivated, it is not really God that these people serve, but themselves.

Legalism: Some people may try to serve God in hopes that this will either earn them eternal salvation or help them hang on to it. Of course, this is contrary to the grace of God in salvation and in sanctification (Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 3:1-9).

False guilt: A failure to trust God to forgive their sins may cause some people to try to serve God in order to work off their guilt, as in works of penance. But this ignores God's promise of complete forgiveness to all who confess their sins (Colossians 2:13; 1 John 1:9).

Self-seeking: Financial gain, preeminence, power, or self-aggrandizement may motivate some to try to serve God. Obviously, they are only serving their own selfish desires. The Bible has examples of those who were so motivated (Matthew 6:1-6; Mark 12:28-40; Php 1:15-18; 3 John 1:9; 2 Peter 2:14-15). The apostle Paul taught against such motives (2 Corinthians 4:2-5; Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6; 1 Timothy 6:1).

Legitimate biblical motivations The Bible presents some powerful and clear motivations for service and godly living. Good motives may overlap, and some seem higher in principle than others. Here are five easily identifiable motives from the New Testament in somewhat of an order of priority.

Love: This includes first a love for God, then an accompanying love for others (Matthew 22:37-39). A Christian motivated by love works for the benefit of the One loved. Love for God is often demonstrated through obedience (John 14:21; 1 John 5:2). Love also expresses itself in a desire to glorify (John 12:27-28), please (Colossians 1:10; Colossians 3:20, 1 Thessalonians 4:1), and know God (Php 3:10-14; 1 John 4:16). Love for God would also mean love for that which God loves, thus we love other people (2 Corinthians 5:14; 2 Corinthians 12:15, 1 John 4:11, 1 John 5:2).

Gratitude: Because we benefit from God's actions, we may wish to respond gratefully. Our service and our lives become a "Thank You" to Him. In light of God's blessings, we are motivated to offer our bodies to Him (Romans 12:1-2) and to live for Him (Galatians 2:20). Paul was motivated to serve God with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 1:12).

Eternal Significance: We can be motivated to fulfill our longing for some significance beyond this temporary life according to God's original purposes. God created us to participate in His rule over the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). This will be fulfilled in His coming kingdom to the degree that we are faithful in our responsibilities in this life (Matthew 19:27-30; Luke 19:11-27) or our faithful endurance in suffering (Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:12). The enjoyment of this earned inheritance should inspire godly conduct (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5). The book of Hebrews promises those who are faithful a share in Christ's future rule (Hebrews 1:14; Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 4:1, Hebrews 4:9, Hebrews 6:11-12). Eternal significance can begin when we engage in serving Christ in this life (Matthew 10:38-39; Matthew 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-26).

Rewards: We can also be motivated by God-given rewards in this life (Mark 10:28-31) and in eternity (Matthew 16:27; Revelation 22:12). The judgment seat of Christ is the scene of future rewards. There all Christians will appear and give an account (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:9-13). Eternal rewards include treasures (Matthew 6:20) and crowns (1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Timothy 4:8). Motivation also comes from the possibility of losing out on eternal rewards (Matthew 22:1-14; Matthew 25:14-25, Luke 19:11-27, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Rewards are not a selfish motivation if our goal is to use them to glorify God in the end.

Duty: Some Christians will serve God because they have made a commitment to do so, or because they are living up to that which God has called them to do. Duty does not expect a reward, but is performed out of obligation (Luke 17:7-10). This is seen in Jesus' own commitment to do what God had called Him to do (Mark 1:38; John 12:27; John 17:4; Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 5:5-10). Paul was motivated to live up to his calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 20:24; 2 Timothy 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:11, 2 Timothy 2:7). Christians might also feel it their duty to be faithful stewards of their gifts (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Timothy 4:14; 1 Peter 4:10-11) or the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:17-18; Colossians 1:25; 1 Timothy 1:11, 1 Timothy 1:18, 1 Timothy 6:20, 1 Timothy 2:14, 2 Timothy 2:2, Titus 1:3).

Fear: This motivation is inferior to love (1 John 4:18) but can motivate the Christian away from sin or unfaithfulness and towards godly conduct. One might fear a negative judgment at the judgment seat of Christ (James 2:13; James 3:1) which can include shame (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 John 2:28) or loss of reward (1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 1 Corinthians 9:27). The Christian may also fear God's temporal discipline (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 11:29-32, Colossians 2:23-25, 1 Timothy 4:14; James 5:15-16, James 5:19). The book of Hebrews effectively uses five fearful warnings to motivate its readers away from apostasy and on to maturity (Hebrews 2:1-4; Hebrews 3:7-19, Hebrews 4:1-13, Hebrews 4:1-13, Hebrews 6:1-12, Hebrews 10:26-31, Hebrews 12:25-29). There is also a positive aspect of fear in the sense of reverence, which is also a motivation for the Christian (Acts 10:2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:21; Php 2:12; Hebrews 12:28).

Conclusion

Just as there are illegitimate unbiblical motivations to serve God, there are legitimate biblical ones also. We should learn to seek the highest motivations in our own service. We should also learn to motivate others toward service or godliness with the best motivations. It is healthy to evaluate our motives for serving God or for growing in godliness so that we might serve Him better.

02.04. Characteristics of a Grace-oriented Church

GraceNotes - no. 4 by Dr. Charlie Bing Characteristics of a Grace-oriented Church

Many Bible-believing churches talk about grace. But are they consistent in their practice? Here are some things that should characterize a church that follows the biblical principles of grace. Relevant Bible passages are listed for further study.

Free Grace is taught and preached consistently. A grace-oriented church encourages gospel preaching that makes it clear that we are saved by grace plus nothing, through faith plus nothing, in Christ plus nothing. Their gospel message does not imply that we have to make commitments to God or do any good works in order to be saved, or do the same afterward to validate that we are saved. Assurance of salvation is available to all who believe in the promises of God. Likewise, our subsequent Christian growth is based on grace just as our initial salvation was. Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:16; Titus 2:11-12

People are encouraged to grow in grace. Grace gives people both motivation to grow and room to make mistakes while it gently guides them into maturity. This is the process of discipleship. Growth in grace has as its goal Christlikeness. A church that is serious about making disciples will help people grow deep in the Christian life. Ephesians 4:7-16; Colossians 2:7; 1 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Peter 3:18

Grace is the primary motivation for Christian living. There is a positive approach to ministry which motivates people to grow by grace not guilt. Preaching and teaching does not make people feel unnecessarily guilty. Instead of emphasizing what we are or are not doing, grace emphasizes who we are in Jesus Christ. This motivates us to live up to who we are as God's greatly blessed children. Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 2:20-21; Ephesians 4:1

People are accepted as they are. A church should model God's own love and gracious actions toward all people. Though we are each different and prone to sin, God accepts us because we are His children in Christ. A grace-oriented church shows acceptance to people not only when they come to Christ for salvation, but also as they try to live the Christian life. Such a church accepts differences in culture, personality, opinion, giftedness, questionable matters, and personal preferences because God has accepted the person. Romans 14:1-13; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 1:6 The unbiblical extremes of license and legalism are avoided. Grace is not perverted into an excuse to do whatever we please, called license. The Bible says that grace teaches us to live godly lives. The opposite perversion of grace, legalism, implies that we must adhere to non-biblical or man-made standards to be acceptable to God. A church can exert subtle or overt pressure to conform outwardly to such artificial standards. But a grace-oriented church holds to the Bible's clear teachings, is flexible in the unclear issues, and never allows human rules to supercede the authority of Scripture. Mark 7:1-23; Romans 6:1-23; Colossians 2:20-23; Titus 2:11-12

Liberty is balanced by love. Grace frees us to love and serve God, which means we should love and serve others also. A grace-oriented church will teach how to balance the joyful liberty of the Christian life with a love for God and others. This means that in areas of conscience or questionable things, we are encouraged to temper our activity by considering how it will affect others and by acting only out of love. We are encouraged to use our liberty to serve others. Romans 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, 1 Corinthians 10:23-33; Galatians 5:13-14

There is an emphasis on being, not doing. Busyness is not godliness; godliness is godliness. And godliness begins in the heart with the realization of who we are as God's children through faith in Christ. The grace-oriented church encourages godliness by emphasizing growth in our personal relationship to God. Ministry and service come from the joyful desire to honor God, not the mistaken belief that God is not happy unless we are busy. Luke 10:38-42; Ephesians 5:1-2; Colossians 2:6-7; 2 Peter 1:2-11

There is a sincere desire to share the message of grace with the world. Those who have been freely blessed should be willing to share that blessing with others. The "God of all grace" desires all men to be saved through His provision in Christ. If a church is seeking after God's heart, they will be active in reaching the world with the gospel of grace, because that is where God's heart is. Matthew 28:18-20; John 17:18; Acts 1:8; 1 Timothy 1:12-16; 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Those who sin are dealt with biblically. The reality of sin in Christians is understood and addressed biblically. Personal confession and restoration is taught. Sins of a more public or blatant nature are handled by the church lovingly and prayerfully with the goal of restoring the offender to full fellowship with God and the church. The grace-oriented church reflects a healing environment rather than a critical and condemning spirit. Matthew 18:15-20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8; Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Conclusion

Some churches already model these characteristics of a grace-oriented church. Surely many more could. Christians who want a church home that consistently reflects the doctrines of grace will benefit by looking for these things. Christians already in a church should not use the above characteristics to ungraciously condemn that church's weaknesses. Rather, they should gently and lovingly encourage the church to strive for these goals. The best way to help a church become grace-oriented is to let the people see these principles at work in our own lives first.

02.05. A Model for Balanced Discipleship

GraceNotes - no. 5 by Dr. Charlie Bing A Model for Balanced Discipleship

Christians agree that Jesus directed us to make disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. But making disciples means different things to different people. How can we know when we have made a disciple? Is someone who has passed a course or series of courses a disciple? Is someone a disciple who has learned Bible doctrine? Or have we made a disciple when we teach a Christian to have a regular quiet time or devotional? A survey of discipleship programs, courses, and books demonstrates the different understandings of what it means to make a disciple. Some are never clear in what they are trying to produce, and it quickly becomes evident that there are different ways to get there. Some material is weighted heavily towards knowing doctrine or the Bible. Others choose to emphasize disciplined habits such as prayer, Bible study, and witnessing. Still other material might focus on relationships or on character.

One element that seems consistently lacking in discipleship materials is proper motivation. Perhaps this is why many who pass discipleship courses fail to continue their discipleship commitments. Jesus attached a high cost to discipleship. Disciples must be motivated to pay the price. Jesus often spoke of blessings, consolations, rewards, and eternal significance in discussions about discipleship. A truly motivated disciple will overcome all obstacles to learn doctrine and the Bible, do the necessary disciplines, and develop the necessary relationships. That is where grace comes in. The grace of God that brings us salvation is the motivation for following Christ in discipleship. Sadly, many or most discipleship materials seem to miss a consistent application of the blessings of grace to the Christian's life and growth. Yet Jesus incorporated grace in his discipleship teachings as motivation. He spoke of temporal and eternal rewards, a future accounting for our deeds (the judgment seat of Christ), and eternal significance (cf. Matthew 10:37-39; Matthew 16:24-27; Mark 10:28-31; Luke 9:23-26; John 8:31-32). To make a disciple, we must begin with the end in mind. In Matthew 10:25, Jesus says, "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher." Our goal must be to have Christlikeness realized in the disciple. Discipleship programs, courses, or materials should produce a committed follower of Jesus Christ who is grounded in grace and thus motivated to grow in the characteristics of a disciple as taught by our Lord. With this in mind, here is a four-part model for balanced discipleship:

What does God want me to become? This involves transformation as the disciple becomes more like Jesus in inner character.

What does God want me to know? Information in the form of doctrine and Bible knowledge are necessary to a godly life.

What does God want me to do? We can't have true discipleship without discipline, though we can have discipline without true discipleship. The focus here is on application of truth in life and behavior.

What does God want me to enjoy? Here is the motivation for ongoing discipleship as the disciple gains an eternal perspective through the appreciation of God's grace.

Conclusion

Discipleship is more than knowing. It is more than doing. It is knowing, and doing, and being for the right reasons. Those reasons are a Christian's response to God's grace. We know that we are producing disciples of Christ when we see people balanced in Christlikeness through transformation, information, application, and motivation. Such a disciple will produce similar disciples.

02.06. Questions of Assurance from Romans 8

GraceNotes - no. 6 by Dr. Charlie Bing Questions of Assurance from Romans 8:1-39

Spiritual maturity is impossible for believers who have come to doubt their eternal salvation. Yet the lack of assurance is a common problem among Christians and those who call themselves Christians.

Doubts can originate from many sources. Perhaps the person who doubts was never really saved by believing in Jesus Christ alone. Or they could have been confused about the gospel. Sometimes persistent sin or difficult trials may cause people to doubt whether they are really Christians. Some personality types are prone to doubt their salvation because they are oriented toward introspection or emotional feelings. In any case, the lack of assurance is a sad and unnecessary hindrance to growing in grace, since assurance is the birthright of every Christian. John was able to say to his readers, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13 a). In Romans 8:1-39 we find four questions that when asked and answered settle the assurance issue without a doubt. It is no surprise that these questions come in a book that mentions grace more than any other New Testament book. Up to this point, Paul has shown that grace has justified (Romans 3:21-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-21) and sanctified (Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-17) the believer. Now he shows how it secures the believer (Romans 8:17-39). He explains that God has predestined all who are justified to be finally glorified, i.e. conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29-30). That in itself is a strong argument for assurance. However, the end of Romans 8:1-39 represents the mountaintop of this grace logic. The four questions are themselves introduced by a rhetorical question, "What then shall we say to these things?" (Romans 8:31 a). The truth Paul has discussed is so forceful and magnificent it demands a worthy response and conclusion. Here are the four questions presenting his conclusion:

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31 b) This introductory question throws down a challenge to all who would doubt or challenge the sufficiency of Jesus Christ's saving work. Of course, no one exists who can stand against God's final purpose and plan of glorification for those who are His (Romans 8:28-30). Paul's answer to this first question includes a rhetorical question: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). In other words, if God gave us the ultimate gift, His Son, why would He not give us everything else necessary to guarantee our glorification? As believers, we can be sure we are eternally saved because no one can thwart God's plan for us.

"Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?" (Romans 8:33 a) The second question echos from a courtroom setting. No one can charge us with sin crimes because God has justified us (Romans 8:33 b). In the ultimate court, our Judge, the most honorable high and holy God, has acquitted us and declared us righteous before His perfect justice. If God has so pronounced this verdict, who can resurrect the charges of wrong doing that would bring us before Him again? There is no

double jeopardy in God's legal system! As believers, we can be sure we are eternally saved because there is no sin that has not already been dealt with by Jesus Christ our Lord.

"Who is he who condemns?" (Romans 8:34 a) The third question asks if there is anyone who can cast a verdict of "Guilty" against us. But if we were declared "Not guilty" in our justification, who can reverse God's verdict? "It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34 b). When Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished," He was saying that our sin debt was paid in full by His death. He took the punishment for us. Then He arose from the dead proving that God accepted that payment, so we are safe from future punishment. The word "intercession" is also from the courtroom. It refers to the work of a defense attorney or advocate. As our defense advocate, we can count on Jesus Christ to win our case. He now lives in the presence of God, at His right hand, pleading our case before the Father (Hebrews 7:25). His plea for us is based on the finished and sufficient work He did on the cross. As believers, we can be sure we are eternally saved because our sins, past, present, and future, remain paid for by Jesus Christ Himself.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:35 a) Who can come between us in our relationship to God? What can interrupt His purpose to love us from the beginning of our salvation to its final destination? Paul's answer is inclusive. He searches the physical universe and the spiritual realms to find anything that has the power to come between us and our Heavenly Father.

Hardships like "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword" (Romans 8:35 b) tempt us to think that since God allows these things, He must not love us. But there is no contradiction between God's love for us and our suffering. Even forces as powerful and menacing as death, evil spirits, or the uncertainty of the future can not cancel God's love for us. And the phrase "any other created thing" (Romans 8:39) even includes us! His conclusion is comprehensive: Absolutely nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39 b). With such an assurance, we who have believed should never doubt that we will be with God forever.

Conclusion Can anything interrupt God's love for His children which brings them to their final destiny of being glorified in the image of Christ? Paul answers, "No one, no thing, no where, no way!" Our eternal salvation rests in what Jesus has done for us and God's ensuing faithfulness and power. What God has promised He will do. We can rest in the assurance of this salvation if we have received it as a gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ our Savior. These four questions from Romans 8:1-39 keep us from looking subjectively at our feelings or our conduct. Instead, they keep us focused objectively on the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Anchor of our souls.

02.07. Making Right Choices in Questionable Issues

GraceNotes - no. 7 by Dr. Charlie Bing Making Right Choices in Questionable Issues

Sometimes Christians must choose whether or not to participate in certain "questionable" practices. A questionable issue is a "gray area" of activity or a choice not directly addressed by the Bible as right or wrong. Good Christians can disagree about many gray areas: Whether to use alcohol, tobacco, or caffeine; or what are appropriate movies, music, and magazines; or whether to participate in certain traditions surrounding Christmas, Easter, or Halloween; etc.

Some resort to extremes to settle the issues. One extreme is license: If the Bible does not prohibit a practice then there is freedom under grace to participate. The other extreme is legalism: A judgmental certainty about these issues that demands total abstinence. Both extremes neglect critical examination of the issue and the biblical principles, and both short-circuit the maturing process (See Hebrews 5:13-14). The Bible gives us guidelines for making responsible decisions about questionable issues.

Under grace we are free, but we should use our freedom to make good decisions. A good decision is one that pleases God, and is beneficial to all. In short, a good decision is one that reflects love towards God and others (1 Corinthians 10:24).

We know that God speaks clearly about some things. In those cases we are morally bound to obey. Some commands contain no ambiguity, such as "Do not be drunk with wine" (Ephesians 5:18 a), or "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18 a). But when the Bible is silent, we are free to choose responsibly according to the principles in God's Word. These principles are summarized below in four crucial questions that we should ask when making decisions about questionable things. The principles are from 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, 1 Corinthians 9:1-27, 1 Corinthians 10:1-33 where the questionable issue is eating meat offered to idols. Some early Christians would never think of eating meat offered in idolatrous sacrifices. But others reasoned that it was just meat and had no implicit spiritual value. While Paul argued that no food was intrinsically evil (1 Corinthians 8:8), he went on to explain that it would nevertheless be reckless and inconsiderate for the meat-eating Christians to eat without regard to the effect it might have on themselves and others (1 Corinthians 8:9-13). His argument extends through chapter 10, where we find his conclusion. Here are the four guiding questions based on his conclusion in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 : Does it edify or enslave me? In 1 Corinthians 10:23 Paul says, " All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify." The "All things" refers to those activities about which God is silent. We should choose to do only those things which help us grow in grace and holiness towards Christlikeness. Paul realized that just because God does not pronounce something wrong, it was not automatically right for the one who might do it. Participation could bring a weaker Christian into bondage: "All things are lawful for me . . . but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 6:12) . If a former idol worshiper became bold enough to eat meat sacrificed to idols, he could be drawn back into the idol feasts at the idol temples, and even participate in idol worship again. Similarly, a weak Christian who views certain

questionable magazines or movies may find himself drawn toward more explicit and harmful materials that could lead to sin or an addiction to pornography. Does it help or hinder other Christians? This principle is summarized in 1 Corinthians 10:24 : "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being." Then 1 Corinthians 10:25-29 explain how we must not do anything that would hurt another Christian's conscience. Instead, what we choose to do should help other Christians grow in Christlikeness. We should never do anything that causes a brother or sister in Christ to compromise his or her conscience so as to bring condemning guilt. For example, it would not be wise or loving for a strong Christian to offer an alcoholic drink to a new Christian who has an alcoholic past. This could bring condemnation of conscience, or worse, a lapse back into alcoholism. (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; Romans 14:19-21) Does it glorify God? "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). In other words, if you can get a nose ring to the glory of God, do it. While it is conceivable that someone could do such a thing to identify culturally with those he is trying to reach with the gospel, he might just as easily draw attention toward himself and away from God. So one must examine his motives carefully to see if his choice is driven by vanity or some other self-centered interest, or by an honest attempt to magnify God. When participating in anything, we should be able to pause and give God praise and glory for it (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:30). Does it weaken my witness to unbelievers? Paul wouldn't do anything that distracted from his message and ministry: "Give no offense . . . just as I also please all men in all things . . . that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:32-33). He even gave up his right to receive financial support when in Corinth, lest some impugn his motives for preaching the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:1-27). Some unbelievers have strong convictions about certain issues. We should not do anything that makes it harder for them to hear the gospel from us. For unbelievers, the issue should be the gospel message, not the messenger.

Conclusion

Someone summarized how to choose in questionable issues this way: "Love God, and do whatever you like." Certainly, if we act in love toward God, we will also act in love toward others, and we will make wise choices in unclear issues. But be warned: You can't please everyone! Some Christians are career complainers and criticizers. These need to be gently instructed away from their legalism or judgmental spirit. In short, they need to grow up and learn how to make mature and responsible choices.

02.08. The Unifying Message of the Bible

GraceNotes - no. 8 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Unifying Message of the Bible Is the Bible one book or many? There is much that makes the Bible diverse. But what ties it together? If it is really one book, we would expect a unifying story or message similar to a plot in a novel. Too often the Bible's stories are isolated from any overall message. If we know that main message, we will better understand the Bible in its parts. The Bible's Diversity

There are 66 books in the Bible written over a period of 1600 years by over 40 different authors. These authors had diverse backgrounds (e.g., prophets, priests, kings, fishermen). They wrote different kinds of literature (e.g., law, narrative, prophecy, poetry, personal letters) from different places (e.g., Israel, Babylon, Persia) to diverse audiences (e.g., Ninevites, Palestinian Jews, scattered Jews, Roman Christians) with a variety of moods (e.g., sorrow, joy, worship, anger, love). The Bible's Unity

Yet the 66 books of the Bible are placed under one cover that claims one Author, God. What is the common message they share as one book? Various suggestions have been posited for the Bible's main message, or "center." Some suggest it is God, or God's glory, or salvation. Others focus on its forward movement and suggest the covenants, or the promises, or the kingdom. Others simply assert that Jesus Christ is the unifying theme. To be complete yet concise, as well as helpful, the main message of the Bible should be stated in a full sentence. It is not complete or helpful to say that the Bible is about God, or Jesus Christ, or salvation, anymore than it is to say that Moby Dick is about a whale, or the sea, or revenge. The Bible's Unifying Message Here is a suggested statement of the the Bible's message in one concise sentence:

God is working to re-establish His rule over creation through man in the coming King and His kingdom.

Note the careful choice of words. First, we recognize the Bible is about God. He is the main character behind its literature and movement. But God is actively working to do something. He is reestablishing His rule over creation. This rule was entrusted to mankind at creation. God said, "Let us make man in Our image" (Genesis 1:26). The original form of the Hebrew justifies the translation "Let us make man as Our image." In other words, man was to be God's representative over the kingdom of creation, or a co-ruler with God who would rule in His place.

Too much has been written about what it means to be made "in (as) God's image." When we let the context speak for itself, we find a common idea repeated constantly. Man is to rule or have dominion over creation (Genesis 1:26-28). In ruling, man is as God. But man lost his ability and moral authority when he sinned against God in the Garden of Eden. He lost the right to rule as God's representative on earth. Both God and man's rule was usurped by an enemy, the devil. Though God maintains sovereign control, Satan has power over this earth. He is called "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). First John 5:19 says, "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." As proof of his power and control, Satan offered all the kingdoms of the world to

Jesus Christ if Jesus would only worship him (Matthew 4:8-9). So God's purpose for man was thwarted by Satan. Addressing God, the psalmist wrote about man, You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor.

You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;

You have put all things under his feet. (Psalms 8:5-6) To fulfill this purpose for man, God must work to re-establish His rule over the kingdom of earth, but it must be through man, not apart from him. To do what the first man, Adam, failed to do, God sent a second Adam, Jesus Christ. To show that He identified with mankind in His mission, Jesus preferred to call Himself "Son of Man". As both God and man, Jesus conquered Satan. At His first coming, Jesus, through His own death, destroyed Satan's spiritual power over mankind (Hebrews 2:14). At His second coming, Jesus will also destroy Satan's physical reign over the earth and re-establish His own Kingdom (Revelation 20:1-10). Mankind, through King Jesus, will once again rule creation as God intended. The Bible's Story The Bible's message is unveiled in a story, much like a novel's plot. The conflict introduced in Genesis is finally resolved in Revelation. The plan to re-establish God's rule was unveiled as soon as that rule was lost. God told Satan that he would be destroyed by a descendant of the woman (Genesis 3:15). Genesis shows how God then selected a people (Abraham's descendants) which he narrowed to a nation (Israel) from which He chose one tribe (Judah) who would produce the King (Genesis 49:10). This plan He secured through a series of covenants with Abraham (to bring a blessing to the world), to David (to bring the King), and to Israel (to bring a New Covenant that includes forgiveness, a new heart, and the indwelling Holy Spirit). Meanwhile, God gave Israel the covenant of law through Moses to establish them as a nation, to help them enjoy life under the covenant with Abraham, and to lead them to faith in the coming King. Every book of the Old Testament contributes to this story of God re-establishing His rule through the coming King. The New Testament presents Jesus as the King. Through His death and resurrection Jesus destroyed Satan's spiritual control over man. His miracles authenticated His authority and showed us kingdom conditions. But Jesus was rejected and crucified. Now we wait for Christ's return to finish Satan completely and set up His kingdom where we will rule once again through Him.

Conclusion

Though not always easy, the Bible student's task is to show how every part fits into the whole. Every book and story in the Bible contributes something to the unifying message. If we isolate the stories from this message, we teach out of context. To the extent that we do so, we rob people of the glorious hope of our destiny as God's people.

Finally, the message of the Bible is based on God's grace from beginning to end. God initiates His program of blessings for those who do not deserve it, who constantly disobeyed, who killed His only Son, and who constantly fall short of His standards. God's program and promises will not be fulfilled by our faithfulness, but only by His faithfulness. That is grace.

02.09. Why Teach About Rewards?

GraceNotes - no. 9 by Dr. Charlie Bing Why Teach About Rewards? The word reward (*misthos*) comes from the Greek word for pay or wages. While salvation is absolutely free, rewards are clearly earned. Reward passages are found throughout the Old and New Testaments. Could something so prominent be illegitimate? Here are ten reasons why Christians should be taught about rewards: To emphasize our eternal significance. As God's children, we enjoy a relationship with Him now and in eternity. The quality of that relationship can be enhanced forever as a reward for our present and temporary lives. Rewards remind us that who we are outlasts this life. Romans 8:17; Hebrews 11:16 To teach our responsibility in this life. That God rewards us for present choices makes us accountable for those choices. Worthy actions, thoughts, and words will bear the fruit of reward in eternity. Conversely, that which is unworthy will cause the loss of reward and shame. Romans 14:10-12; 1 John 2:28 To enhance our present life. Rewards are not only eternal; some begin in this life. They can greatly increase the enjoyment of our present experience. Matthew 16:25; Mark 10:29-31 To appreciate God's pleasure in giving rewards. God initiates rewards because He is pleased to do so. And who are we to deny God pleasure? He delights to bless His children with good things. It is a common and commendable human urge to express appreciation for or reward good behavior in our own children. Would we expect less from our heavenly Father? Matthew 6:6, Matthew 6:18, Matthew 25:1-21 To give the proper framework for interpreting the Bible. Many rewards passages are incorrectly interpreted as salvation passages. This hopelessly confuses God's free grace in salvation with God's earned rewards in the Christian's life. The result is a theology that undermines faith alone in Christ alone and the Christian's assurance. For example, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 is a rewards passage that some wrongly interpret as a salvation passage. That would mean the apostle Paul lacked assurance, since he based it on his performance. Matthew 10:32-33; Revelation 2:1-29, Revelation 3:1-22 To motivate us to do the good works which God purposes for us. Ephesians 2:10 says God created us in Jesus Christ to do good works. While not the only motivation, rewards are one way God encourages us to do what He wants. 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 2 John 1:2 To balance our concept of God's justice. God punishes unbelievers according to the degree of their evil deeds. It makes sense that He would also reward believers according to the goodness of their deeds. If proportionate retribution curbs wickedness, then proportionate rewards cultivate righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12; Revelation 22:12 To prepare us for eternal service. Since some rewards imply an increased capacity to serve God and others, and if that capacity is carried into eternity, then they will help us better serve Him there. The Bible promises that we will reign with Jesus Christ. The extent of our rule is rewarded according to our faithfulness in this life. Stewardship is constantly connected with rewards for the faithful discharge of responsibilities. Matthew 24:45-51; Matthew 25:13-30; Luke 19:11-27; 2 Timothy 2:12 To legitimately motivate us to godly living. When rewards passages are wrongly interpreted as salvation passages, the unavoidable motivation for good works is to validate one's salvation and escape hell. Fear can easily become the motive for good works. But fear of hell can never motivate the believer, who is eternally secure. It should only motivate the unbeliever. The believer can only fear loss of rewards.

But even that fear is only one of many motives for godly living. Deeds done from unworthy motives will be revealed for what they are and will not be rewarded. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 To bring greater glory to God. If rewards increase our participation in God's glory, or give us a greater capacity to experience God's glory, then our rewards also enable us to give Him more glory. In Revelation 4:10 the 24 elders cast their crowns before Christ's throne. Whoever these elders represent, the crowns that they wear certainly symbolize reward, honor, and glory given them for some reason. They are then able to use that honor to glorify God by offering Him their crowns. In other words, they honor God more by having crowns than if they didn't. The rewards we receive will better enable us to bring Him more glory. Ephesians 1:11-12; 1 Peter 5:4

Conclusion

Initial salvation by the absolutely free grace of God does not conflict with the subsequent merit of rewards in the Christian life. Rewards are not the only, or necessarily the best, motivation for godly living. Love, gratitude, and duty are some of the highest motivations for serving God in this life. But there is nothing wrong with the encouragement and consolation that rewards bring. Since rewards are decreed and designed by God, they shouldn't be considered inferior or scorned in contempt. Every Christian should be taught about rewards.

02.10. Word Pictures for Christian Workers

GraceNotes - no. 10 by Dr. Charlie Bing Word Pictures for Christian Workers

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a word picture also has great value for those who study the Bible. These word pictures, called metaphors, can give us great insight into God's truth. Seven word pictures in 1 Corinthians 3:1-23 and 1 Corinthians 4:1-21 are especially helpful for those involved in Christian service. Here the apostle Paul is correcting the Corinthians' misconceptions about ministers of the gospel. Sometimes he uses an explicit metaphor, other times he suggests a word picture. From these we gain valuable insight into what it means to minister the gospel to God's people. Note that four word pictures concern the worker's relationship to others, and three concern the worker's relationship to God. We will address them in that order.

The Christian Worker as a Parent. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 the apostle Paul assumes the role of a spiritual parent. The motherly role is suggested as the one who feeds her children appropriately. Normally, a mother feeds younger children milk until they can handle solid food. Just as a mother feeds her children age-appropriate food, so the minister is responsible to feed people according to their spiritual capacities. The metaphor of a mother is also found in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 where Paul wants his readers to understand how he gently nourished and cherished them while he imparted his life to them.

Likewise, 1 Corinthians 4:15 contains a comparison to the father. Here Paul suggests that since he has given spiritual birth to the readers, he is therefore attached filially and responsible for them spiritually. In 1 Corinthians 4:16 Paul urges them to 'imitate me.' The word imitate (mimeomai) is the root of our English word mimic, and suggests a child's tendency to mimic adults, especially parents. In this way, Paul assumes the fatherly role of a loving leader and example. In a similar metaphor in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-11, we see that the father's role includes giving exhortation, comfort, and guidance. The parent-like responsibility of the minister is therefore both loving care and leadership.

The Christian Worker as a Servant. In 1 Corinthians 3:5 Paul calls himself and Apollos 'ministers.' This designation comes from the word diakoneo, which means to serve, and was often used for waiting on tables (cf. John 12:2; Acts 6:2). This is an amazing word picture given the ancient Greeks' aversion to voluntary service to others. Paul used the term to describe himself again in 2 Corinthians 4:5 to make it clear that the central focus of his ministry was the preaching of Jesus Christ, not himself. He was merely a servant of God's will. Such humiliation of the Christian worker moves others to follow (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:15-16). It is leading by serving.

The Christian Worker as a Gardener. In 1 Corinthians 3:6 we find a word picture that evokes a gardener, or perhaps a farmer: 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.' This comparison is also self-effacing so that God gets the credit for the life-change in others. The gardener's role is simply to plant and cultivate what God causes to grow (1 Corinthians 3:7). Though only instrumental, the minister's horticultural work is nevertheless important in God's ordained process for changing lives. Christians who work hard in the garden (or field) are rewarded for their labor (1 Corinthians 3:8).

The Christian Worker as a Builder. Paul switches to an architectural metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3:10 where he compares himself to a 'master builder' who

laid a foundation. The original noun, *architecton*, bears obvious similarity to the English counterpart. The builder's work is described by a word (*epoikodomeo*, 1 Corinthians 3:10, 1 Corinthians 3:12, 1 Corinthians 3:14) that is used figuratively for strengthening or building up Christians (cf. Acts 20:32; Colossians 2:7; Jude 1:20). The metaphor is used to emphasize the importance of pure methods and motives in ministry to others. A Christian worker can build in a worthy or unworthy manner. The day of testing will reveal the quality of his work (1 Corinthians 3:12-13) and God will reward accordingly (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). Every Christian worker should therefore 'take heed how he builds' (1 Corinthians 3:10). The Christian Worker as God's Co-worker. In 1 Corinthians 3:9 Paul calls himself and other ministers 'fellow workers.' The noun used is from a verb (*synergeo*) that means to work together, cooperate (with). The word picture suggests cooperation in a common purpose. That purpose is to bring people to maturity and completion in Christlikeness (Colossians 1:28-29). Those who minister to others must realize and maintain a close partnership with God in which God is the major Partner. This arrangement removes any reason for pride or selfish motives in the worker. The Christian Worker as a Slave. In 1 Corinthians 4:1 Paul uses a rich word picture, which is unfortunately hidden in the simple translation servants. The word (*hyperetes*) literally means an under rower, as in a slave who rowed in the lower deck of a ship. It came to mean an assistant under another's authority (cf. Mark 14:54, Mark 14:65, Acts 13:5) or one in a subservient position. Paul evokes this metaphor to correct the Corinthians' elevated estimation of the minister's role. Christian workers are nothing more than slaves. Jesus Christ is the Master; the duty of the Christian worker is to obey without reservation. The Christian Worker as a Steward. Also in 1 Corinthians 4:1 Paul assumes the designation of steward. The word (*oikonomos*) includes the word for house (*oikos*) to mean a household manager. As such, the steward is responsible for the property and possessions entrusted to him by the master of the house. His chief duty is to 'be found faithful' in the discharge of his responsibilities (1 Corinthians 4:2). Overseers in the church are called stewards of that ministry (Titus 1:7) and all Christians are charged as stewards to use their gifts in ministry to others (1 Peter 4:10). The Christian worker must realize that the discharge of his or her stewardship will be judged by the Lord, the Master (1 Corinthians 4:4). As in Jesus' parable, dutiful stewards are rewarded with the approbation 'Well done, good and faithful servant' (Matthew 25:23).

Conclusion

In Within this single section of Scripture God has given Christian workers seven word pictures as a pattern for ministry. The church belongs to Jesus Christ; Christians who serve in it function as His servants. We serve by offering others loving care and leadership, humble service, cultivation of spiritual growth, and strengthening as we cooperate with God in a common purpose, obey God, and faithfully manage the ministry He has committed to us. We should serve so that the message, not the minister, is central. The more we conform to this pattern, the more God will use us to impact others. In doing this, we fulfill our God-given ministries.

02.11. Some Questions for the Lordship Salvationist

GraceNotes - no. 11 by Dr. Charlie Bing Some Questions for the Lordship Salvationist

Followers of Lordship Salvation insist that a person is eternally saved not only by believing in Jesus Christ as Savior, but also by committing completely to Him as the Lord or Master of one's life. Thus salvation also depends on repenting from all sins and giving subsequent evidence of changed conduct and good works. Those who do not persevere in good works and faithfulness till the end of life prove that they were never really saved to begin with. Adherents to Lordship Salvation teach that we are saved by "costly grace" which means they interpret the commands for discipleship (e.g., deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Jesus, etc.) as the price that must be paid for eternal life. Here are some key questions for those who hold to Lordship Salvation, asked in love of course!

How do you know when you've really believed? Since your idea of "genuine faith" must be proved by works and obedience, how do you know your faith qualifies as the real thing, since you can always do and obey more? What is it that really saves you anyway, your faith, or Jesus who is the object of your faith? How can your faith be validated by subjective introspection when your feelings and experiences fluctuate? And if the object of your faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, saves you, shouldn't you validate your faith only by whether it rests in Him?

How do you know when you've thoroughly repented? Since you are not conscious of every sin (cf. Leviticus 4:2; Leviticus 5:15), what if some sins are overlooked and not repented of? At what point do you think you've adequately repented: When your attitude changes about the sin? When you resolve to change your conduct? When your conduct actually changes? When you make restitution or ask for forgiveness? Or when you are sure that there will be no repetition of the sin? And if repentance is not just a change of attitude but a turning from sins and a change in conduct, then why does Jesus tell people to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8)?

How do you know when you're completely committed to Christ's Lordship? How much commitment is enough to secure your salvation? Is the willingness to commit enough, or must you actually commit everything? And how would you know what everything involves, especially as an unbeliever? Since you believe the commitments required for discipleship are also commitments needed for salvation, and they are ongoing (e.g., deny yourself, take up your cross daily, follow Jesus, abide in God's Word, love Christ supremely, etc.), how do you know when you have fulfilled them?

How can you expect an unbeliever to make spiritual decisions that reflect spiritual maturity and an understanding of God's will? Aren't you getting the cart before the horse? If an unbeliever is dead in sin, how can that unbeliever know and desire what God wants him or her to do and obey? Isn't knowing and obeying God's will the essence of the Christian's life after one believes? Have you remained completely committed to Christ's lordship? If you haven't, isn't that an indication that you were never fully committed? And wouldn't that mean you were never really saved? Or is it an

admission to the reality and power of sin, a reality that would make it impossible for anyone to make the full commitment demanded by your view of salvation? Which sins disqualify a person as a true believer? Again, is there a list of certain sins that prove one is not saved? What about King David's sins of murder and adultery? Since he was surely saved, do sins have to be worse than his to prove one is unsaved? How much sin is a Christian capable of? Since you undoubtedly agree that Christians do sin, how much is too much before you deny he or she is a true Christian? Where do you draw the line? Why does the Bible instruct church discipline for Christians who sin?

If salvation depends on your perseverance in faithfulness and good works, how can you know for sure you are saved? Though you may be living faithfully now, how do you know what tests or temptations you will face tomorrow? If you can not predict the future, isn't there a chance you could sin and die before you repent? As long as that is possible, how can you say with certainty that you are a true Christian and that you have any assurance of eternal life? How could you honestly give assurance of salvation to anyone who says he or she believes the Gospel? Where is there room to grow? If your saving faith included obedience, forsaking all sins, a committed life, and a guarantee of faithfulness, what is left to do? Why are there so many ethical demands in the Bible addressed to Christians? Aren't they unnecessary if a godly life is inevitable? Did the apostle John preach a false Gospel? Since the Gospel of John does not mention repentance, or submission, or commitment to Jesus as Lord as conditions for salvation, but does mention believe as the condition for salvation 98 times, would you call that "easy believism?" Do you think John was ignorant or irresponsible (But I know you believe that is impossible since this is God's inspired Word)? Since his is the only book of the Bible that claims it was written to tell people how to be saved (John 20:31), shouldn't it determine what you believe about the condition for salvation? And by the way, isn't your "costly grace" a contradiction in terms? If grace is a free gift to you paid for by Jesus Christ, how can it cost you anything? If you do anything or make any commitments to merit God's grace, doesn't that compromise and cancel it (Romans 4:4; Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-9)? How then can you receive the grace of salvation by any way other than simple faith?

02.12. The Grace Life

GraceNotes - no. 12 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Grace Life

What is the Grace Life? It is the Christian life as God intended it. It is a life of freedom to live as a child of God. It is living the Christian life consistent with grace. Not only is grace the basis of our initial salvation (justification), it is also the basis of our growth (sanctification). By God's grace we are born into His family and by God's grace we are free to grow as His children. Unfortunately, this life of liberty can be lost unless we stand firm in grace. The balance: Liberty controlled by love

God intends that Christians enjoy the liberty we have gained through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Christ fulfilled the law and set us free from bondage to it (Galatians 4:4-7). He also set us free from the tyranny and power of sin (Romans 6:14). We are not to use our freedom to serve ourselves, but we are to use our freedom to serve God and others. Love is the controlling principle that constrains the proper and godly use of our freedom (Galatians 5:13-14).

Two extremes can pervert God's grace for living the Christian life into an unhealthy, even disastrous, imitation of the true Grace Life. These perversions of Christian liberty are noted in Scripture. We call one license, the other legalism. Living by either extreme throws the Christian's life of liberty into imbalance.

One extreme: License The first extreme, license, is the abuse of grace to serve oneself selfishly and sinfully. It is an unrestrained life that scorns God's commands. The Christian who falls into license may reason that he can indulge in sin because his eternal salvation can't be lost, or because he is forgiven already, or at least, he rationalizes, "God will forgive me when I sin." This is the immature attitude behind the objections noted in Romans 6:1 and Romans 6:15. There, the questions are raised, should we sin to experience more grace and because we are not under the law? The answer is, absolutely not! In Christ, we have died to sin and should serve a new Master, Jesus Christ.

Though we are not under the old Mosaic law, we have many New Testament commands to obey, chief among them is to love God and to love our neighbor, both of which preclude self-serving and sinful behavior. The licentious Christian fails to realize how he or she is despising grace and how such conduct forfeits fellowship with God in this life as well as benefits in eternity, and invites God's disciplinary action.

Another extreme: Legalism The Grace Life can not only be perverted by license, it can also be perverted by legalism. Legalism is the abuse of grace that seeks to bring Christians either back under the Mosaic law or some artificial standard for acceptance with God that has been created by others. The legalist insists on following a list of do's and don'ts such as those which seem to be behind the warnings in Galatians (Galatians 4:9-10, Galatians 5:1-3) and Colossians (Colossians 2:16-23). Legalistic Christians can easily fall under the expectations of others that make them feel guilty falsely. For example, they can be made to feel that they are not spiritual because of what Bible translation they use, how they dress, what they eat or don't eat, what movies they see, what

music they listen to, what church meetings they do or don't attend - or any other issue which the Bible does not address directly.

What the legalist fails to realize is that Jesus not only set us free from the Old Testament law (Romans 6:14; Romans 7:1-46; Galatians 3:13; Galatians 4:4-7) but He also set us free from artificial man-made standards that are not in the Bible. We are accepted by God because we are His children by grace (Galatians 4:7). We stand accepted by grace (Romans 5:1-2) and are thus secured by His grace until the time that we see Him (Romans 8:29-39). Since every believer is accepted on the basis of grace we should accept other believers who differ on issues not clearly defined as right or wrong in the Bible (Romans 14:1-23). The legalist has "fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4) in that he now relies on his own performance to complete his relationship with God. What he doesn't understand is that he must always perform perfectly or he is condemned by his own standard, whatever it is. Only Jesus Christ's perfect performance is acceptable to God, and therefore, only Christians who trust in that gracious provision are acceptable to God. The way to please God and live up to the standards of the law is to love (Galatians 5:14).

Conclusion

We must be careful to balance our Christian living on the principle of grace from beginning to end. The same grace extended to us at initial salvation assures us of growth and acceptance with God in our Christian life. We are free from sin, the law, and artificial rules and thus also from condemnation. But our freedom must be restrained by love for God and others. That produces the Grace Life that pleases God.

02.13. Assurance and Hope in Colossians 1:21

GraceNotes - no. 13 by Dr. Charlie Bing Assurance and Hope in Colossians 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight - if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard . . . - Colossians 1:21-23 The misuse of this passage has too often undermined the believer's assurance. Incorrect interpretations usually start with the assumption that the phrase "to present you holy, blameless, and irreproachable in His sight" means entrance into heaven. The typical Arminian interpretation sees this presentation-salvation as dependent on the believer's faithfulness in conduct and to the gospel. In other words, salvation can be lost. The common Reformed interpretation views this passage through the lens of perseverance. They see the conditional "if you continue" referring back to the reconciliation of Colossians 1:21 and/or the presentation of Colossians 1:22, which they take as entrance into heaven. If a supposed Christian does not persevere (continue) in faithful conduct and faith in the gospel, it will prove that this person was never really a Christian (or reconciled) to begin with.

Two interpretations avoid these theological pitfalls and make better use of the text and context. The first interpretation assumes that the "if" has in view the reconciliation and/or the presentation, but also assumes that the presentation is referring to final salvation. Those who hold this view explain that the Greek construction of the conditional "if" expresses confidence, not uncertainty. In other words, the apostle is saying "If... and I'm sure you will ..." Thus the conditional sounding "if" really means "since." However, such certainty can not always be assumed for this form of the Greek conditional statement. The better interpretation takes the presentation of Colossians 1:22 as the subject of "if." Furthermore, the presentation does not refer to salvation or entrance into heaven, but the prospect of one's evaluation at the judgment seat of Christ, the bema. In this view, the apostle is declaring that faithfulness in conduct and a sure hope in the promise of the gospel will yield a holy, blameless and irreproachable life at the bema. This view is commendable for many reasons:

It correctly and consistently assumes the saved status of the Colossian readers. Paul is not writing to pretend Christians, but "saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (Colossians 1:2) who have a reputation for faith and love (Colossians 1:3), who have been delivered from the power of Satan into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13), and who are redeemed (Colossians 1:14) and reconciled (Colossians 1:21). How inconsistent and confusing it would be for Paul to tell them they are reconciled to God in Colossians 1:21 then make it uncertain or conditional in Colossians 1:23! Besides, unbelievers do not have a faith in which to continue!

It does not make salvation dependent upon the believer's performance, but is consistent with the gospel of free grace which Paul emphasizes in Colossians 1:5-6 and reminds them of in Colossians 1:23.

It reinforces the already expressed concept found in Colossians 1:3-5 that the fruit of hope is sanctification. There the Colossians are commended for their "faith in Jesus Christ" and their "love for all the saints." This faith and love is "because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." Hope (as an expression of desire plus expectation and very close to faith in meaning) stimulates a life of faith toward Christ and love toward others.

It is consistent with the non-absolute sense of spiritual maturity expressed as the apostle's goal of ministry in Colossians 1:28 : "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." The presentation is not to qualify one as saved, but to qualify one as complete or mature. The concept of being acceptably presented to the Lord is found elsewhere in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 4:14, 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Jude 1:24). Romans 14:10 uses the same verb (*paristhmi*) to indicate the believer's appearance before the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ.

"In His sight" (which can also be translated "before Him") reminds of the believer's accounting before the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ where each believer will be evaluated and rewarded according to his deeds (Romans 1:1-12; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The qualitative terms, "holy, and blameless, and irreproachable" are not used absolutely or forensically, but denote a relative sanctification which is the goal of ministry (Colossians 1:28). They are used in the same way as the terms for qualifications of imperfect elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-10; Titus 1:5-9). The achievement of this goal, to be presented "holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight," depends on their not being moved away from their hope, which they heard and believed in the gospel. We note that they had in fact heard and accepted this hope in the gospel. Thus the warning is not to shift away from the position of confidence in their future which they presently enjoyed. Hope was their anchor for spirituality. The passage reminds of Hebrews 6:18-19 where hope is called an "anchor of the soul," that which brings us into the presence of God, the safest place possible. The Colossians will reach their spiritual goal only if they remain in this safe harbor firmly anchored to Christ Himself.

Conclusion This passage does not speak of eternal salvation dependent on the believer's perseverance in the faith. Such an interpretation makes assurance of eternal salvation impossible. Rather, it expresses the believer's assurance in terms of a sure hope that God will keep His promise in the gospel. To lose hope is to lose assurance. To lose hope and assurance is to lose the stimulus for the two indispensables of sanctification - a living faith in Christ and love for others which obtain a good presentation at the judgment seat of Christ. The message of this passage is clear: Stay grounded in the grace and hope of the gospel.

02.14. Falling From Grace in Galatians 5:4

GraceNotes - no. 14 by Dr. Charlie Bing Falling From Grace in Galatians 5:4

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. Galatians 5:4

What does it mean to fall from grace, especially as that phrase is used in Galatians 5:4? The interpretation of that verse has important implications for the Christian.

Some Misinterpretations

Unfortunately, Galatians 5:4 is misunderstood by some. One faulty interpretation is that it describes the action of an unbeliever who rejects the gospel. Yet it is clear that the apostle Paul is writing to Christians in this epistle. In the immediate context, he declares that they have been set free by Christ (Galatians 5:1) and calls them "brethren" (Galatians 5:11). The New King James translation, "you who attempt to be justified," does not refer to unbelievers trying to be saved, but acknowledges that under the law the most a person can do is attempt to be justified, because ultimately "no one is justified by the law" (Galatians 3:11).

Another inadequate interpretation, the common Arminian one, is that Paul is addressing believers who lose their eternal salvation. Not only is this against the whole tenor of scriptural teaching about the security of salvation, it misunderstands the concept of grace in relation to salvation as well as the argument that Paul sets forth in Galatians. Below is a brief exposition of this verse in its context. The Context Developed The context shows that Paul assumes the readers' saved status from the beginning of the epistle (Galatians 1:2-4). He reminds them that they were called "in the grace of Christ" (Galatians 1:6). The concept of grace is at the heart of the proper interpretation of Galatians, and at the heart of the Galatians' misunderstanding of their relationship with God. Apparently they did not understand all the implications of their salvation by grace and were easily confused by false teachers (Galatians 1:6-9, Galatians 3:1, Galatians 4:17, Galatians 5:7, Galatians 5:12). Paul is seeking to dissuade the Galatian believers from trusting in the Old Testament law as a means of sanctification. That would be contrary to the principle of salvation by grace. That is why he criticized Peter for not being consistent with grace (Galatians 2:11-14) and explained "I do not set aside the grace of God" (Galatians 2:21). Since the Galatians began their Christian lives "in the Spirit" they should not think they could grow to maturity by their own fleshly efforts at keeping the law (Galatians 3:2-3). The law only brings a curse (Galatians 3:10). As believers who have been justified through faith, the Galatians are now "sons of God" (Galatians 3:26) and no longer slaves to the law (Galatians 4:5-7). They need to "stand fast" in their liberty and not become entangled in the bondage of the law (Galatians 5:1). If they revert to legalism, Christ will not profit them in sanctification (Galatians 5:2), because keeping the external requirements of the law by fleshly efforts cannot bring anyone closer to God. To be acceptable to God, they must keep the whole law perfectly (Galatians 5:3), an impossibility.

Interpretation of Galatians 5:4 In Galatians 5:4, Paul explains that believers who revert to the law are estranged from Christ." "Estranged". translates the verb *katargew*, which means to be separated or loosed from something, or to render something ineffective, inoperative, or powerless. Paul uses the same word in Galatians 2:21 in the sense of set aside.. His readers have been estranged in their relationship with Christ (not cut off in their position as Christians) in that His grace is inoperative for them if they go back under the law, which is what circumcision signifies (Galatians 5:2). They are in Christ, but not living by the power of His grace. The verb translated "fallen" is *ekiptw* which has a broad range of meaning, but usually means to fall from something or to lose one's grasp of something. The Galatians had lost their grasp of grace, not Christ, salvation, or justification. A believer can not be un-justified (cf. Romans 8:30), but a believer can certainly live in contradiction to God's principle of salvation and sanctification by grace. At the essence of Paul's argument is the contrast between grace and law. They are opposites which do not mix; they are mutually exclusive. One either trusts in the grace of Christ for righteousness, or the law. Adherence to one system repudiates the other. It is only through faith in God's provision that both positional (Galatians 3:24) and practical righteousness (Galatians 5:5) is obtained, not through the works of the law.

Therefore, with the phrase "fallen from grace" Paul is not addressing the Galatians' position in Christ; he is addressing their practice, or their Christian walk. The position of the Christian is sure: Every believer stands in grace (cf. Romans 5:2) as a child of God (Galatians 3:26) set free from the bondage of the law (Galatians 5:1). But Christians can compromise their position with inconsistent practice by trying to keep the requirements of the law or some other external system in their own efforts.

Application

If we as Christians live in outward obedience and submission to the externals of any law or religious system, we do not elevate our spirituality, but lower it. Such legalism can not make us closer to God, but creates a chasm in our relationship to Him. We fall from grace. Perhaps we could say we have a "falling out" with God, because we spurn His gift of grace - the same grace that saved us - in favor of our own achievements. This spirit of legalism goes beyond adherence to the Old Testament Law. For example, if we worship to impress others, we do not "impress" God. If we have daily devotions only to satisfy a schedule, we do not "satisfy" God. If we trust in our sacrificial service to earn God's favor, then we ignore God's sacrificial gift to us. Only life in the Spirit under the grace of God can produce the righteous life that God desires.

02.15. Interpreting Hebrews: Beginning with the Readers

GraceNotes - no. 15 by Dr. Charlie Bing Interpreting Hebrews: Beginning with the Readers

Many find Hebrews a difficult book to interpret. Perhaps the greatest difficulty is in interpreting the five warning passages (Hebrews 2:1-4, Hebrews 3:7-19, Hebrews 4:1-13, Hebrews 6:1-8, Hebrews 10:26-39, Hebrews 12:25-29). Many commentaries treat these as warnings to those unbelievers Amos 1:1 the readers. This views the target audience for the warnings as those who profess, but do not possess, the faith. But is this consistent with the evidence in the text? Most agree that the rest of the book clearly addresses believers. Is there any apparent disparity between the way those in the warnings are addressed and the rest of the epistle?

Evidence from outside the warnings

Common sense shows that the epistle was written to believers, as most agree. Little needs to be said here. Apart from the warnings, we find the readers addressed as "brethren" (Hebrews 10:19, Hebrews 13:22) and "holy brethren" (Hebrews 3:1). Things are said to them that can only apply to Christians (cf. Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 6:9, Hebrews 5:12, Hebrews 10:24-25). Note that all these appear shortly before or after the warning sections.

Exhortations

Also, the nature of the exhortations in Hebrews 13:1-25 shows they are obviously intended for believers. There is no attempt to apply them to two different groups. In fact, in the entire epistle, the warning passages are never introduced with any transition that indicates the author is shifting his attention to a different group within the readership. To imply otherwise is artificial and therefore disruptive to the flow of the text.

Evidence from within the warnings We now examine how the author speaks to those warned. His language makes it clear they are Christians.

They are addressed using first person plural pronouns, which shows the author identifies with them as believers ("we" in Hebrews 2:1, Hebrews 2:3, Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 3:19, Hebrews 4:3, Hebrews 10:26, Hebrews 10:30, Hebrews 10:39, Hebrews 12:28; and "us" in Hebrews 4:1-2, Hebrews 4:11, Hebrews 6:1-3, Hebrews 10:26, Hebrews 10:30, Hebrews 10:1-39, Hebrews 12:28).

They are also called "brethren" (Hebrews 3:12). Just as in the non-warning sections, this clearly shows their common position in God's family.

They have believed (Hebrews 4:3, Hebrews 10:39). This speaks of an unqualified faith in Christ as Savior. They are not said to have almost believed, or believed in an insufficient way.

They have Christian confidence (Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 10:35). This refers to their assurance of the benefits of Christ's provisions. They are therefore told to hold fast (Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 4:14, Hebrews 10:23) and endure (Hebrews 10:36) in that confidence.

They are in danger of denying their faith. They have not yet, but could "drift away" (Hebrews 2:1), depart "from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12), "fall away" (Hebrews 6:6), "draw back" (Hebrews 10:39), or "turn away" (Hebrews 12:25). All such language demands a point of departure from which they can fall. The only such point in the epistle is Jesus Christ and their confession of Him.

They are encouraged to enter God's rest (Hebrews 4:11) and go on to maturity (Hebrews 6:1). As in the Old Testament, "rest" refers not just to the reception of God's promise, but the enjoyment of it. It is a privilege of believers only, as is the possibility of growth into maturity.

They suffered for their faith after they were "illuminated" (Hebrews 10:32-34). They were able to endure this persecution because they knew they had a heavenly possession (Hebrews 10:34).

They are never told to believe in Christ, which we would expect if they are unbelievers. It would be a travesty for the author to omit this. Instead, he says the epistle was written to exhort or encourage the readers (Hebrews 13:22).

They are described as having experienced the blessings that come with faith in Christ. The most convincing evidence is from Hebrews 6:4-5 : They were "enlightened," had "tasted the heavenly gift," had "become partakers of the Holy Spirit," and had "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." Any attempt to apply these descriptions to unbelievers forces the text at the expense of good exegesis and the plain sense of the language. They had also "received the knowledge of the truth" (Hebrews 10:26), were "sanctified" (Hebrews 10:29), "know" God (Hebrews 10:30), were "illuminated" (Hebrews 10:32), and by implication are called "just" or righteous (Hebrews 10:38).

They are given Old Testament analogies that in the past and now in their present apply to God's chastening of His people. In Hebrews 3:16 Psalms 95:1-11 is used of the redeemed who came out of Egypt and so obviously applies to the redeemed readers. In Hebrews 10:30 Deuteronomy 32:36 speaks of God judging "His people." That this applies to believers is obvious in Hebrews 10:31 where there is the prospect of falling "into" the hands of God. They can not fall out of His hands.

They are exhorted to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28), something impossible for unbelievers.

They face the prospect of rewards conditioned on their faithful perseverance and obedience. They can be "partakers of Christ" (Hebrews 3:14), can enter God's rest (Hebrews 4:9, Hebrews 4:11), can have "an enduring possession . . . in heaven" (Hebrews 10:34), can receive a "great reward" (Hebrews 10:35), and can "receive a kingdom" (Hebrews 12:28).

Conclusion The evidence is overwhelming, both in the general nature of the epistle and in the warnings themselves, that the author is addressing Christians. There is no need to see those addressed by the warnings as unbelievers. They are not in need of salvation, but faithful endurance. Evidently, these are Jewish believers who are tempted to mask their Christianity with Judaism, or revert altogether, because of the threat of persecution.

Probably the reason so many interpret these warnings as to unbelievers is because of the severe judgments threatened, especially those that mention fire. Should the mention of fire automatically imply the threat of eternal damnation? Absolutely not! But that is another study.

Let us who believe take to heart both the exhortations to grow in our confession of Christ and the warnings about neglecting that growth. All of Hebrews can apply to us.

02.16. Is There a Sin God Does Not Forgive?

GraceNotes - no. 16 by Dr. Charlie Bing Is There a Sin God Does Not Forgive? The fear of unforgiveness

Both believers and unbelievers sometimes express fear that they have committed a sin that is unforgivable. This steals the joy of their salvation, the assurance of their salvation, or with unbelievers, the hope of ever being saved. They may even think they have committed the so-called "unpardonable sin," or more biblically, "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."

It is very clear that Jesus died for all sins (Colossians 2:13). This would include sins committed before belief as well as those committed after, and even those which are still future. God will not be surprised by future sins such that He will regret giving eternal life and therefore take it back. Once saved, a believer is secure forever.

It is also clear that even what many consider the most terrible sins are covered by God's provision through Christ. Fornication, adultery, and homosexuality are among those sins the Corinthians had committed when the apostle Paul reminded them "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). King David was forgiven for committing adultery and murder (2 Samuel 12:13).

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

Jesus said of one - and only one - sin that whoever does it "never has forgiveness" (Mark 3:29). But the nature of that sin is not so clear.

Though called "the unpardonable sin," Jesus actually said, "but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men" and "whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:31-32). Every sin is pardonable through Christ, but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never experience that pardon.

"Blasphemy" means to speak evil or injuriously of someone. But even blasphemies against Jesus Christ can be forgiven (Matthew 12:32; cf. Mark 3:28). So there must be a difference between blasphemy against Jesus Christ and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Various interpretations There are several interpretations of this difficult warning:

It is Israel's national rejection of the Messiah. In this view it can only be committed by the nation of Israel at the time of Christ's presentation of Himself to them as King. Therefore, it can not be committed by individuals, and it can not be committed today. It is true that in Matthew's account Christ seems to be presenting Himself as Israel's King who will bring in the kingdom. In the context that follows, Christ calls His generation an "evil generation" which deserved condemnation because of their rejection of the King (Matthew 12:39, Matthew 12:41-42). But some doubt this interpretation because Jesus said this warning applies to "anyone," which denotes individuals. It

also clearly a sin that involves speech: "anyone who speaks a word against..." (Matthew 12:32).

It is accusing Christ of satanic allegiance. In this view someone verbally accuses Christ of satanic origin. The scribes said of Jesus, "He has Beelzebub" and "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons" (Mark 3:22). Some would counter that if this was spoken out of ignorance, it would be a slander against Christ which could be forgiven (Matthew 12:32; Mark 3:28). When Mark 12:30 explains that this warning is "because they said, 'He has an unclean spirit,'" it may imply that Christ is warning them that by slandering Him they are close to committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, though they have not yet done so.

It is disbelief in the gospel. Of course someone who does not believe the promise of the gospel can not be forgiven in their unbelief. Also, this view of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit allows it to be committed today by any and all unbelievers. One problem with this view is that the warning seems more specific and serious than this. If this view were true, why not simply call the sin unbelief? But it is also a sin that involves speech and not just a rejection of Christ, but a rejection of the Holy Spirit's testimony. Besides, unbelief can be forgiven.

It is a willful and slanderous rejection of the Holy Spirit's testimony about Christ. This is a sin that reveals itself in the perverse verbal accusation that Jesus Christ is in league with the devil. The Father witnesses to the Son both through prophecy and His verbal approval at Christ's baptism. The Son witnesses through His own words and works. These witnesses are external. But the Holy Spirit witnesses through His convicting ministry (John 16:7-11). This witness is internal. When the Spirit convinces an unbeliever who Jesus Christ is, and that person nevertheless accuses Him of being satanic, he has committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Matthew's discussion that follows this warning emphasizes that one's words reveal one's heart condition so that "by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:33-37). The accusation that Jesus is of the devil reveals the moral blindness of a person who would call light darkness. It displays a heart hardened beyond hope of forgiveness, because there is nothing left to appeal to the conscience when the Holy Spirit's testimony is rejected and slandered. Can it be committed today?

According to the last three interpretations, this sin could be committed today. The last and perhaps most convincing interpretation would say that this sin could be committed by someone who knowingly and maliciously rejects and slanders the Holy Spirit's convicting ministry about the person of Christ. It would be hard to know when someone knowingly rejects the Holy Spirit's testimony and is not doing it out of ignorance, but God knows.

Conclusion

Interpreting the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not easy. We would do well to focus on what is clearly taught in these passages. It is clear that Christ's warning was to unbelievers. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can not be committed by believers. In fact, if a believer worries that he has committed this sin, this is a good argument that he hasn't because he evidences a conscience.

God's grace covers every sin, but that grace must be appropriated. God can and will forgive any and every sin, but an unbeliever who blasphemes the Holy Spirit is morally blind to the degree that his heart is hardened by his conscious rejection of Jesus to the point that he will never appropriate His grace of forgiveness. Any unbeliever who believes will be saved. But any unbeliever who blasphemes the Holy Spirit demonstrates a spiritual condition that precludes a receptive attitude

toward the gospel.

02.17. Traditions or Traditionalism?

GraceNotes - no. 17 by Dr. Charlie Bing Traditions or Traditionalism? A church can live - or die - by tradition. Some church traditions are good and helpful: meeting at a certain time, familiar music, or holiday observances. These can build a family spirit and create a comfortable culture. However, traditions can sometimes be harmful. A tradition is a custom or habit that becomes part of the expected church culture, for good or for bad. Traditionalism, however, is valuing traditions as unwritten laws which are over, above, and therefore against the Word of God. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees who held to many traditions which conflicted with God's direct commands. For example, He condemned the practice called "Corban" in which a person could dedicate their goods to the temple (i.e. for God's use), but then deny help to their own parents for that very reason saying that their goods and finances were Corban and thus unavailable. This, of course, was contrary to the fourth commandment to honor one's parents. "You reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition," Jesus told the Pharisees (see Mark 7:1-23; cf. Matthew 15:1-20).

Using the account in Mark 7:1-37 we see will why Jesus considered traditionalism harmful. We will also list some proper attitudes toward traditions.

Dangers of Traditionalism Jesus indicated several dangers that come from traditionalism:

Traditionalism can breed hypocrisy (Mark 7:6-7). When certain traditions become so familiar that the reason behind them is forgotten, then actions can become perfunctory and give the impression of spirituality. Hymns can be sung without heart, prayers predictable, and rituals routine. Though a person might impress others as spiritual because of his practices, the outward doing does not reflect the inner motive or desire. A person can be far from God, while feigning godliness by conforming to tradition. That is hypocrisy.

Traditionalism can nullify the Word of God (Mark 7:8-13). This happens when a tradition supplants obedience to a clear command or principle in the Bible. The practice of Corban illustrates this danger. A modern day example might be the worship of Mary, which became official Catholic church practice in A.D. 432, but contradicts the commandment against worshiping anyone but God. Some Protestant churches have apparently placed certain traditions on the same level as God's commands by insistence on things like a particular translation of the Bible, hymns only (or contemporary music only!), an "altar call" (or none), issues of frequency and practice of the Lord's Supper, or the use or non-use of musical instruments (the organ versus drums, for example).

Traditionalism produces and promotes a false spirituality (Mark 7:14-23). People may genuinely feel that they are more spiritual or closer to God because of a ritual or tradition. But Jesus taught that it was not things external that defile us or make us closer to God, it is things internal. Organ music in an America church does not bring someone closer to God than crude drums under a tree in Africa. Neither can the kind of bread we use in the Lord's Supper (or wine, or juice, or cup, or cuplets). Praying with raised hands does not make one a super-Christian. The issue in all these things is the motive and desire of the heart. But traditionalism can easily ignore the heart and

depend on external practices to give one the feeling of spirituality.

Proper Attitudes toward Traditions As said, traditions can be good. It depends on our attitude toward them and toward those who might disagree or have different traditions. Here are some suggestions for a healthy attitude toward traditions.

Give freedom where the Bible is silent. The Bible speaks to many things which should be followed scrupulously, but it also ignores many issues. For example, it says nothing about how many times a week a church should meet or the time of day. And while the Old Testament mentions many musical instruments for worship, the New Testament mentions none. If there is no clear command about these things in the Bible, then we have the freedom to meet whenever and use whatever instruments help us in our worship. The Bible is also silent about neckties, pulpits, hymnbooks, powerpoint, passing a collection plate, and walking the aisle. If the Bible does not speak to the issue, churches should feel free to do whatever enhances their worship and relationship to God.

Don't become proud of traditions. Since they don't commend us to God and may even keep us from God, why should we be proud? We can learn to appreciate the traditions of other people, churches, and denominations if we learn their reasons and if they are sincerely following God's Word, not changing it. We can also learn to hold our traditions more loosely if it benefits others to change them.

Realize God is a God of Change. Though God never changes, His ways certainly do. Much of God's promises are for new things: a new birth, new heart, new song, new Spirit, New Covenant, new heavens and earth, etc. Someone who likes things to stay the same could be terribly uncomfortable in heaven! Every tradition was new at one point, so don't be afraid to start a new tradition. Be open to new ways of doing things. Churches used to use chalkboards, then came overhead projectors, now many use computerized powerpoint presentations (What's next, 3-D holograms?). Society, culture, and people change; so must the ways we use to reach them.

Make sure your traditions are relevant. Traditions are good if they help people understand God's truth and grow in it. But this is unlikely to happen through outdated and irrelevant means. For example, how many people still relate to "bringing in the sheaves" as a metaphor for evangelism? We should seek the most relevant metaphors for our particular culture. When we ourselves change or we forget the reasons for a tradition, they easily become irrelevant.

Conclusion

Some traditions are good and some are harmful, but we should always avoid the proud spirit of traditionalism which exalts man's customs over God's Word. If we are honest in our evaluation we might find that many of the church's sacred cows better serve us as holy hamburgers. The area of keeping traditions and respecting the traditions of others is a good opportunity to show grace and acceptance to others who have different practices and backgrounds. After all, it is grace that saves us, not traditions.

02.18. Should You Cut Off Your Hand?

GraceNotes - no. 18 by Dr. Charlie Bing Should You Cut Off Your Hand?

Mark 9:43-50 is one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. On the surface, it looks like Jesus is teaching that a believer should cut off his or her hand/foot/eye so that he or she will not sin. To some it seems to suggest that a believer who sins could lose his or her salvation and end up in hell. But to those who believe in salvation by grace, that interpretation doesn't work. What then is Jesus saying?

Some observations

Looking at some details will help us understand the strong language in Mark 9:43-48. First, the context is crucial. Jesus' extreme statements are part of a section beginning at Mark 9:33 and ending at Mark 9:50. Following a dispute among His disciples about who would be the greatest, Jesus teaches about true greatness. He indicates that greatness is found in accepting and valuing those usually considered insignificant, as He models in His own attitude toward little children (Mark 9:36-37), then conversely in the disciples' errant attitude toward the weaker or less informed believer who did not associate with them (Mark 9:38-41). The reference to "these little ones who believe in Me" in Mark 9:42 looks back at least as far as the less informed believer, but the plural seems to include the believing children. "Little ones" is not referring to size or age, but the immature state of one's faith. The severe fate of sinking in the sea with a millstone around one's neck (Mark 9:42) shows the seriousness of not causing less mature believers to stumble, or sin.

Second, we know that the hand, foot, and eye do not actually cause sin, but are the means by which we act out sin. Jesus had just taught in Mark 7:1-37 (especially Mark 7:20-23) that sin comes from the heart to defile the sinner.

Third, Jesus did not actually say that the sin in view sends the one who does it to hell, even though this is the inference by the average reader. In fact, the sin had evidently already been committed to some degree. It is only after the hand/foot/eye "makes you sin" that the cutting off is exhorted. Thus the sin in question has not caused the sinning one to go to hell, if indeed that fate is even threatened to him or her.

Fourth, the sin must be specific and severe. These extreme measures would not be necessary for sins of a lesser variety. Even if the language is hyperbolic, which it most surely is, the force of the figure is to emphasize a terrible sin. There is only one sin named in the context, and it is both specific and severe - causing "little ones who believe in [Christ] to stumble" (Mark 9:42).

Fifth, it seems disjunctive for Jesus to warn about causing another to sin (Mark 9:42) and then turn abruptly to talk about one's own sin (Mark 9:43 ff). Therefore, it would seem likely that the sins of the hand/foot/eye are connected to what we do or how we influence the weaker believer in Mark 9:42. The connection that works well is this: The sins that disciples commit can lead less mature believers to sin also. This explains why the emphasis is on the external hand/foot/eye and not the

heart as in Mark 7:1-37. A disciple can not lead a weaker believer to sin by wickedness in the heart only; it has to be acted out so as to be seen.

Sixth, there is a contrast between the temporary loss of a hand/foot/eye and the eternal suffering of hell. Of course, in the kingdom, bodies will be restored whole and healthy and not remain maimed. If we are consistent with the Scriptures, only believers will have life and the kingdom, and only unbelievers will go to hell. A suggested interpretation

It seems then that Jesus seeks to motivate greatness by drawing a stark contrast about those who go into the kingdom and those who go into hell. Greatness comes from recognizing those who are usually considered less significant. Especially less mature believers should be valued, not tempted into sin which could destroy their weak faith. Therefore, disciples of Jesus Christ must deny, or cut off, their own desires that cause them to sin before weaker believers. This may be difficult and painful and may cause some disciples to come to the kingdom with a sense of loss. But that temporary sense of loss is obviously better than the ultimate end for unbelievers who sin with abandon disregarding the impact on those around them and enter into hell whole to suffer forever. In other words, disciples shouldn't grieve about losses in this life when they sacrifice desires for the sake of others, because enduring such a brief loss is nothing compared to the unbeliever who indulges in sin and endures eternal hell. An illustration For example, a man may be tempted to cheat on his wife and commit adultery with another woman with whom he has fallen in love. To do so could easily lead weaker believers who know him to justify the same sin in their lives. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, the man should cut off the desire or the affair and suffer the temporary feeling of loss knowing that the unbeliever, who may feel free to commit adultery in this life, is destined to a terrible future in hell. This man should remember that his destiny is the kingdom and be grateful for the privilege of denying himself to follow Jesus Christ and serve others, which is true greatness.

Fire and salt This interpretation is supported by the equally difficult Mark 9:49-50. "For everyone will be seasoned with fire" is meant to explain what has been said just previously. It seems Jesus is referring to the fire that will judge everyone's works. The believer's choices and actions will be judged and rewarded accordingly (1 Corinthians 3:12-15), as will those of the unbeliever (Revelation 20:12-13). Disciples who deny themselves for Christ will have those sacrifices "seasoned with salt," a figure denoting the pleasing and attractive nature of the sacrifices, because "Salt is good" and was sometimes used to "season" Old Testament sacrifices (Leviticus 2:13). Luke 9:50 is a fitting close to this section. "Have salt in yourselves" is an exhortation to be attractive to all people (with a Christlike attitude that values them), and "have peace with one another" reflects back on the initial dispute about greatness at the opening of this section.

02.19. What About a 'Christian' Who Doesn't Live Like One?

GraceNotes - no. 19 by Dr. Charlie Bing what about a 'Christian' Who Doesn't Live Like One?

Everyone knows somebody who calls himself or herself a Christian, but doesn't act like one. Christians struggle with how to think about these folks. What would you conclude about these following examples and how would you help these people?

Examples of the problem

Example 1 - Lisa's husband shows no evidence of being a Christian. Mark told her that when he was young he went forward in a church and was baptized. He even thought he was called to preach once. When Mark got older, he taught a Sunday school class, but now he has absolutely no interest in church or spiritual things. Lisa is really irritated that Mark still considers himself a Christian when he has no interest in spiritual things. She does not know whether he is saved or not.

Example 2 - Jessica, Rob and Donna's sixteen-year-old daughter, was having some discipline problems at home and school. They knew that part of Jessica's problem was a set of bad friends who drank and used drugs. Rob and Donna convinced her to go to a church retreat where Jessica raised her hand in response to a gospel invitation and talked with the pastor that evening. Rob and Donna were so happy, because it seemed their prayers had been answered. Jessica even got involved with the youth group and went on a summer mission trip to Mexico. All this lasted less than a year. Jessica began to see her old friends again and later had to enter rehab for heroin addiction. Rob and Donna were so sure she had been saved, but now are only confused.

Example 3 - Jim tells his supposedly Christian neighbors, Craig and Karla, that he is not a Christian. They brought him to church once and told him afterward that he needed to become a Christian by believing in Jesus Christ. But after looking at their lives he has concluded he has nothing to gain - in this world, anyway. He watches Craig and Karla take their kids to church a couple times a month, but rarely do they stay with them. He knows that Craig cheated on Karla last year and that she cheats on her boss by padding her expense account. Craig seems to love football and beer more than his wife and children, and the shouting matches at home all but prove it. The only difference Jim sees between his life and their lives is that he has more time than they do to go fishing on Sundays.

Options for answers No Option - They lost their salvation. Although some Christians might believe these examples show true Christians who lost their salvation, we would reject that because of the clear teaching that eternal salvation is eternal and secure (John 10:28-30; Romans 8:29-39). For those who profess to be born-again Christians but fall short of the expected Christian lifestyle, other options explain their behavior more biblically from a grace perspective.

Option 1 - They were never truly saved. Perhaps they never really understood the facts of the gospel message about the work of Christ on the cross on their behalf. Or perhaps they did not

understand the response of faith required of them. They may have made some kind of "decision" or prayed a prayer, but it was either based on false information, peer pressure, or an emotional impulse instead of biblical grounds. It is helpful to ask such people a "diagnostic" question such as, "If you should die, and God asked you 'Why should I let you into My heaven?' what would you say to Him?" Their answer will reveal what they are depending upon to get into heaven, or to have eternal life.

Option 2 - They are really Christians who have yet to mature in their Christian walk. One would expect new Christians to experience a period of growth out of old habits and worldly tendencies and into a new lifestyle. The length of this growth period may vary, but it is expected that a discernible level of Christian maturity should develop. To such people we must provide biblical teaching and biblical motivations of grace, rewards, and usefulness in God's purpose.

Option 3 - They are really Christians who are struggling with sin. Some Christians because of their past habits, addictions, or their personality struggle with the enticements of specific sins and sometimes fail. They may have been Christians for a long time and even seen some growth and change in other areas of their lives. However, there is a besetting sin that enslaved them before salvation, perhaps from youth. They find it difficult to break the powerful hold it has on an area of life. This could be true of those who were addicted to alcohol, drugs, or sex for example. These believers need help in understanding the power of God's Word and Spirit to help them deny the old desires of the flesh and live according to the new desires of the Spirit. They need the Spirit's help to develop new habits to replace the old.

Option 4 - They are "backslidden" Christians. These are true believers who have chosen to live in a worldly way. Some might deny this possibility if the person remains in sin very long. Still, most admit that Christians can make sinful choices and live self-centered lives. Such believers need to be told to repent of their sin, appreciate the grace given them at salvation, and live so as to honor that grace. They need to be reminded that there are both temporal (God's discipline) and eternal consequences (loss of rewards) for those who stray.

Conclusion In the end, only God, and perhaps the person in question, knows for sure whether those who call themselves Christians but don't act like it are truly saved. All we can really do is make sure they understand the gospel and the grace of God it represents, and exhort or instruct them in righteousness. If they are true believers, they will have to give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ for how they lived their lives (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

02.20. Grace Giving

GraceNotes - no. 20 by Dr. Charlie Bing

Grace Giving

Grace can hardly be more practical in the Christian life than when it touches our finances, especially our giving. Giving under the law was compulsory requiring various tithes (tenths) and offerings. Under Old Testament law believers gave in order to be blessed; under New Testament grace believers give because they are blessed. Jesus Christ freed us from the requirements of the law so that we can respond to His wonderful gift of eternal life. While legalistic giving focuses on the outward act and amount, grace giving focuses on the inner motive. The major biblical teaching on grace-motivated giving is in 2 Corinthians 8:1-24 and 2 Corinthians 9:1-15. Those chapters contain many principles about the motivations, amounts, effects, and rewards of grace giving.

Examples of the problem The Apostle Paul commended the attitude and motivation of those in Macedonia who gave so generously. Their giving serves as a good example for us.

We should be freely willing to give. 2 Corinthians 8:3; 2 Corinthians 9:2

We should give ourselves to God first. 2 Corinthians 8:5

We should devote ourselves to helping others. 2 Corinthians 8:4-5

We should be motivated by love for others. 2 Corinthians 8:7

We should give what we purpose in our hearts. 2 Corinthians 9:7

We should give cheerfully. 2 Corinthians 9:5, 2 Corinthians 9:7

Amounts of grace giving

Rather than a fixed percentage such as a tithe, grace-motivated giving is the giver's response of gratitude to God for the many blessings received.

We can give no matter how little money we have. 2 Corinthians 8:2-3

We can give generously and sacrificially. 2 Corinthians 8:3; 2 Corinthians 9:5-6, 2 Corinthians 9:11, 2 Corinthians 9:13

We should give proportionate to how God has blessed us. 2 Corinthians 8:12 (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:2)

Effects of grace giving

Often when gifts are given, we never see or realize the full impact they have. Paul pointed out the effects of the Macedonians' generosity and shows how gifts given in response to God's grace have a chain-reaction effect.

We meet the needs of other people. 2 Corinthians 8:14; 2 Corinthians 9:12

We stir up the faith, love, and worship of recipients by our example. 2 Corinthians 9:2, 2 Corinthians 9:13

We increase in fruits of righteous. 2 Corinthians 9:10

We motivate the recipients to thank God. 2 Corinthians 9:12

We bring glory to God. 2 Corinthians 9:13

We strengthen our bond of prayer and love with the recipients. 2 Corinthians 9:14

Rewards of grace-giving

Though we do not give to gain, the Bible clearly teaches that generous giving lays up treasures in heaven which bring dividends, or rewards to the giver.

We will reap an abundance of God's blessings. 2 Corinthians 9:6

We will have a special experience of God's love and grace. 2 Corinthians 9:7-8

We will always have an abundance to use for future good works. 2 Corinthians 9:8-11

Conclusion To be sure, there are many more principles about giving in the Bible. These chapters form a compact unit that shows what it means to be motivated by God's grace to give generously. Grace giving is one way that we can thank God for His "indefinable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

02.21. Peter as a Model Disciple

GraceNotes - no. 21 by Dr. Charlie Bing Peter as a Model Disciple

"I sure do identify with the Apostle Peter in the New Testament" many Christians have been heard to say. There are reasons why this is not an accident or coincidence. God has given us Peter as a model of a typical disciple. Disciples today can learn and be encouraged from his example.

Peter's Prominence No apostle in the Gospel accounts is given as much coverage as Peter. This prominence is intentional.

He is always listed first. In the three lists of the twelve disciples (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16), Peter is at the head.

He is the spokesman for the disciples. What Peter says usually represents the consensus of the twelve disciples' opinions about Jesus and His teaching (e.g., Matthew 16:15-16; Matthew 17:24, Mark 8:29; Mark 16:7; Luke 9:20; Luke 12:41; John 6:67-69). It is as if Peter says what the others are thinking. In the same way, many Christians today admit that Peter echoes their thoughts. Peter is presented as the leader of the group, a position that he maintains in the early church described in the book of Acts.

He was one of Jesus' inner three. Along with James and John, Peter is privy to the most private conversations and experiences of the Lord Jesus (e.g., Matthew 17:1; Matthew 26:37; Mark 9:2; Mark 14:33, Luke 9:28). Many of these experiences serve as lessons in discipleship. His experiences trace those of a typical disciple. Of all the apostles, Peter has the greatest range of experiences. We see his first encounter with Christ (John 1:1-51), his call to discipleship (Matthew 4:1-25/Mark 1:1-45), his lessons in obedience and faith (Luke 5:1-39), his failure (Luke 22:1-71; John 13:1-38, John 18:1-40), his restoration (John 21:1-25), and his commission into ministry (John 21:1-25). Peter usually initiates or is the central recipient of Jesus' discussions about discipleship's conditions and rewards (e.g., Matthew 16:24-28/Mark 8:34-38/Luke 9:23-27; Luke 14:25-33; Matthew 19:27-30/Mark 10:28-31) Peter's Principles As the typical disciple, we learn many lessons about discipleship from Peter's example. In the episodes that convey these lessons, the terminology of discipleship is prominent or implied. When we look at the Gospels' episodes of Peter's life that mention or imply following in discipleship, we find these lessons:

Disciples should have a vision of what they can become. John 1:40-42. Peter is only a seeker of truth when Jesus indicates at their first encounter that Peter has a solid future as one of His disciples. Jesus said Peter would be called a Cephias, or "rock." Jesus expects a transformation from their association. Disciples and disciplers should begin the discipleship process with the end in mind. That end is to become firmly established in Christlikeness (Matthew 10:25).

Disciples should adopt a life purpose of evangelism. Matthew 4:18-22/Mark 1:14-20. This episode is different from the account in John 1:1-51. Peter evidently had believed in and had some familiarity with Jesus, but has not adopted His life purpose because he is seen still working at his

old profession of fishing. Jesus said that He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and to preach the gospel (Mark 1:38). Peter accepts Jesus' invitation to become a fisher of men also. In becoming like the Master, disciples must submit to His purpose of living to reach the lost.

Disciples should learn to trust and obey the Lord. Luke 5:1-11. Though there is a similar setting of fishing, the details show that this also is a different account from the one in Matthew 4:1-25/Mark 1:1-45. Peter is still engaged somewhat in his old life--fishing for fish, not men. As such, he is not totally submitted to Jesus' call and purpose for his life. When Peter learns to obey, he is blessed with success. He is also willing to leave everything this time. Disciples are only useful and fruitful when obedient. Disciples must learn that God especially blesses when we obey Him in the purpose of evangelism.

Disciples should put God's will first no matter the cost. Matthew 16:24-28/Mark 8:34-38/Luke 9:23-27; Luke 14:25-33. Peter and the other disciples are the recipients of Christ's conditions for discipleship. But these conditions follow Peter's confession about who Christ is and Christ's revelation of His suffering and death. Now that Jesus has told them what it will cost Him to submit to God's will, He tells the disciples what it will mean to follow His will. They will need to pay a price. A disciple must lose his life in order to find it. There is a cost to discipleship, but there is also a reward.

Disciples should let failure and restoration teach them about God's grace. John 13:36-38; John 18:15-27, John 21:15-23. Peter's discipleship is interrupted by failure when he denies Christ on the night of His arrest. He still follows Jesus to a degree, but from a distance. Jesus had predicted this lapse of Peter's faith but also his restoration (Luke 22:31-34). Jesus knew that Peter would return to Him and be used to strengthen others. Peter failed because of pride and presumption. Disciples will fail at times, but must view failure as a detour, not a cul-de-sac, in their overall journey. They must see that God can use their failures to strengthen others in their spiritual journeys.

Disciples should serve God in their own unique ministry. John 21:15-23. Peter's restoration is indicated by Christ's three-fold question "Peter, do you love Me?" Jesus helps Peter focus on the one indispensable qualification for ministry to others love for Jesus. Peter is again told to follow, but when this evokes a question from him about John's future, Peter is told in essence, "Don't worry about him, you follow Me." Jesus is teaching Peter not to compare but to focus on his own unique ministry. Disciples must be taught to focus on their own unique ministry according to their particular gifts and calling.

Conclusion

Peter's story shows the journey of a typical disciple. It teaches us that discipleship is not a static state, but a dynamic journey. A disciple is always challenged to be more of a disciple. Christ's demands following our conversion go from general to more specific. Each call to follow involves more significance, a deeper commitment, and a greater sacrifice. Discipleship is a direction and an orientation as we progressively follow Jesus Christ as Master.

02.22. Repentance: What's in a Word

GraceNotes - no. 22 by Dr. Charlie Bing Repentance: What's in a Word

Repentance has been a troublesome word for Christians and theologians (not to distinguish!). There are differing views on its meaning, translation, and relationship to eternal salvation. Ultimately, the meaning of repentance must be determined by usage and context, but any study of repentance must begin with a discussion of the word itself. The composition of the word The English word repentance translates the Greek word metanoia (verb = metanoew). This word is formed from two words, meta, which means after or change, and noew which means to think (a form of the word nous, or mind). Thus the resulting word suggests the meaning of after-thought or a change of mind. Many language scholars agree on this basic definition.

However, the word itself does not designate what is the object of the change of mind. That is left to the context. In biblical times, metanoia was used in common language for one changing his mind in a non-ethical sense about a variety of things. Thus repentance is a fluid term that leaves its final definition to the context, much like the word dozen, which leaves us asking "Dozen what?" In the New Testament, we see examples of one changing his mind about a sinful attitude (Luke 18:9-14), ineffectual works (Hebrews 6:1), trust in pagan idols (Acts 17:30), or God Himself (Acts 20:21). Though it is most often associated with sin, sin is not always its object. In fact, in the King James Version of the Old Testament the word repent is usually used in reference to God repenting, showing that it does not automatically refer to sorrow or turning from sin. The formation of the word

We should not assume that two root words which are joined to form a third word always give it its precise and final definition. For example, the Greek ekklesia is from ek (out of) and klesis (called, from kalew = to call), thus it literally means called out ones, but we commonly translate it assembly or church.

However, the root words can give us valuable insight into the final word's development and meaning. In the case of ekklesia, the church is indeed formed from those whom God has called out of the mass of humanity. Another example, homologew, is from homoiou (= same) and legw (= to speak), thus we translate it to say the same thing, or agree, confess. Familiar to some, theopneustos, from theos (= God) and pneuma (= spirit/Spirit, breath), gives us God-breathed or inspiration. Or consider exagorazw from ek (out of) and agorazw (to purchase), thus to purchase out of, or redeem.

Tracing the root meanings is very helpful towards, but not determinative of, final meaning. Still, a word's origin is not arbitrary, but informative. Thus we can not ignore the formation of metanoia which gives us the basic definition a change of mind. The translation of the word Our understanding of metanoia is also helped by how the Hebrew word shub (= to turn [from something], used over 1000 times in the Old Testament) is translated. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, it is regularly translated by the Greek word strephw and its various forms. It is never translated by metanoia. If metanoia meant to turn from sin, then we

would expect it to translate the Hebrew word for turn (shub) at least occasionally. In the late second century, church father Tertullian argued that the meaning of "change of mind" is the best translation of metanoia. In the same vein, English-speaking scholars have long complained that there is not a good single-word translation for metanoia. Greek expert A. T. Robertson remarked, "It is a linguistic and theological tragedy that we have to go on using 'repentance' for metanoia." The English word repentance has its roots in the Latin word penitentia which denotes penitence as sorrow, or worse, the Catholic doctrine of penance, in which a person's sins are absolved by a priest's prescribed acts of punishment. Repentance should not be defined in terms of outward action or sorrowful emotion. In light of how metanoia is formed and used, it seems a good translation today would be a change of mind. But there may be a better one. When we examine what is meant biblically by mind (nous) we find that it is sometimes used for the inner orientation and moral attitude. (cf. Romans 1:28; Romans 7:23, Romans 7:25; Ephesians 4:17, Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 2:18). Thus the mind, biblically speaking, is not always the pure intellect. So the best translation of metanoia would be a change of heart. It refers to a person's inner change of attitude and moral direction. The Bible does not psychologically dissect the inner person, but leaves it at that.

Linguistically, a change of heart does not demand a change in conduct, though that is what is normally expected from an inner change. The Bible distinguishes between the inner change of repentance and the outer conduct it motivates. This is clear in the logical progression from inner repentance to outer conduct mentioned in Matthew 3:8/Luke 3:8 and Acts 26:20, and in the unlikely scenario of one changing his behavior seven times in a day in Luke 17:3-4. The implications of the word in relation to eternal salvation, repentance is not a second step or condition. Salvation is always through faith alone in Christ alone. But sometimes there appears to be an overlap between faith and repentance (cf. Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32; Luke 24:47; Acts 11:18; Acts 17:30, Acts 17:34; 2 Peter 3:9). Since faith is being persuaded that something is true, when one is persuaded (believes), there is a change of mind and heart. Repentance is the more general concept, for a person can change his or her heart about something, even God or sin, but not be saved. When one believes the gospel, he is convinced of something he was not formerly convinced of, thus he has had a change of mind or heart about who Jesus is and what He has promised about eternal life, and his own condition relative to that (cf. Acts 20:21). Faith involves repentance, but repentance does not always involve faith.

Conclusion In general, a good translation of metanoia is to have a change of heart. But since this is awkward, we are probably left with the word repentance. Then it becomes our responsibility to explain, clarify, and apply it correctly. Its exact meaning must be clarified by the context. In any case, as an inner change, repentance is in no way a work that merits salvation. Inner repentance can always be distinguished from its outward acts, though one is the cause of the other. In preaching the gospel, believe is certainly the more normative, predominate, and specific word to use.

02.23. Are Disciples Born or Made?

GraceNotes - no. 23 by Dr. Charlie Bing Are Disciples Born or Made? Is a disciple merely another name for a Christian who is born into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, or is a disciple a Christian who meets specific conditions about following Jesus? Knowing the answer to this question is crucial to understanding the gospel of grace and the Christian life. The meaning of disciple The word disciple comes from the Greek verb matheteuo, which means to be or become a pupil or learner. So the essential meaning of disciple is a learner, which could also be called a follower or an apprentice. In ancient culture, a person would follow a "master" teacher or craftsman in order to become like him (Matthew 10:25; Luke 6:40). This took a certain commitment from the follower. The use of disciple

Though the prevalent use in the New Testament is in reference to followers of Jesus Christ, disciple was not just a Christian term. The Bible mentions disciples of Moses, the Pharisees, and John the Baptist. In fact, it seems that John 6:66 uses the word disciples to refer to non-Christians who were following Jesus just out of self-interest or curiosity. In this general way, Judas Iscariot was called a disciple because he followed Jesus to some extent. The book of Acts uses the term disciple(s) to refer to Christians as a group without distinction about their commitment (Acts 6:1-2, Acts 6:7, Acts 11:26, Acts 14:20, Acts 14:22, Acts 14:28, Acts 15:10, Acts 19:10). This is because Luke, the author, understood discipleship as Jesus explained it, and indeed the Christians in Acts were actively and obediently following Jesus Christ with few exceptions. In light of the great commission to "make disciples" which ends the Gospel era (Matthew 28:19-20), it would be natural to call believers in Acts disciples to show that the commission was being fulfilled. The few exceptions of disobedient believers were singled out for special treatment (cf. Acts 5:1-11, Acts 8:13?.; Acts 19:10-19). The Epistles never use the word disciple(s). However, the idea is communicated in the commands to imitate mature believers who themselves imitate Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Php 3:17 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 2 Thessalonians 3:9). The conditions for discipleship When looking at discipleship passages in the Gospels, we see that conditions for Christian discipleship are given consistently to believers. In order for one to be a true follower of Jesus Christ, Christians have to meet certain conditions given by the Lord. These include obeying His Word (John 8:31) and denying one's own desires, being willing to suffer for identifying with Him, and actively pursuing His will (Luke 9:23). There are other conditions as well. All of these conditions involve a commitment, obedience, or some kind of sacrifice from the Christian. If that is true, then discipleship costs the believer something. The distinction of discipleship

It should be apparent that discipleship is distinct from one's initial salvation, that disciples are not born but made. If salvation is free (by grace through faith), but discipleship is costly, then salvation must be distinct from discipleship. This chart should help show the distinctions between salvation and discipleship:

Conclusion To ask whether disciples are born or made is to ask whether justification is different from sanctification or whether Christian birth is different from Christian growth. To keep the gospel clear, we must not confuse the one condition of eternal salvation (faith) with the many conditions of discipleship.

02.24. Eternally Secure

GraceNotes - no. 24 by Dr. Charlie Bing Eternally Secure Can a person once saved ever lose or forfeit that salvation? The Bible answers "No," that a person who is once saved remains saved throughout eternity. This is usually called the doctrine of eternal security, and is often referred to (sometimes derogatorily) as "once saved always saved."

If we asked the question differently, it is easier to see how eternal security makes sense. For example, what if we asked, Can a person eternally saved lose that eternal salvation? Or, Can a person who is justified be unjustified? Or, Can a person who is born spiritually be unborn? Or, Can a person who is freely given the gift of eternal life lose it based on some condition?

Those who believe in eternal security are generally labeled Calvinists. Those who believe that salvation can be lost are generally labeled Arminians.

What the Bible says The Bible teaches eternal security in many different ways. The Bible speaks with certainty about the possession of a new life based solely upon faith in Christ as Savior. John 3:1-16; John 5:24, John 10:28, John 20:31 The Bible refers to this life as "eternal" which means forever and implies no interruption. John 10:28; John 11:25-26

Since salvation by grace essentially means that it is a gift, then it is an unconditional gift which does not depend on a person's works, conduct, or condition after salvation. Romans 3:24; Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9 The Bible teaches that God's predestining purpose and initial justification result in eventual glorification without exception for every believer. Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4-5 The Bible presents eternal salvation as a legal and binding relationship with God that cannot be separated by anyone (including ourselves) or anything. Romans 8:1, Romans 8:31-39 The Bible presents eternal salvation as an irrevocable filial relationship to the Father by adoption which results in eternal blessings. John 17:3; Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 3:26

We are sealed with the Holy Spirit, Who guarantees our glorification. 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30 We are kept secure by the power of both the Father and the Son. John 10:28-30; John 17:9-12; Jude 1:24

Since all of our sins (past, present, future) are forgiven by Jesus Christ and His eternally sufficient sacrifice, there is no sin that can cause us to lose our relationship to Him. Colossians 2:13-14; Hebrews 10:12-14 The intercessory prayers of Jesus Christ and His advocacy when we sin guarantee that our salvation will be completed eternally. John 17:9-12, John 17:24; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1 The Bible speaks of salvation in the passive voice, which indicates that the causality is not with us, but with God; therefore it is based upon His work not ours. Ephesians 2:5, Ephesians 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:4 The Bible demonstrates by example (Abraham, David, Israel) and by precept that God is faithful to His eternal promises even when we are not. Psalms 89:30-37; Romans 3:3-4; Romans 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:13 Some problems with denying eternal security

Denying eternal security presents many problems, such as: How much sin or which sins forfeit salvation? How many times can a person be born again? Is there no degree of intimacy with God beyond mere acceptance or rejection by Him? Is there no consequence for a believer's sin other than Hell? If a person believes in Christ and is saved, but sins and loses that salvation, then what is left to believe that he has not already believed? A condition other than faith alone becomes necessary. It is easy to see that without eternal security assurance becomes impossible and there is no solid foundation for Christian growth.

What about those other passages?

There are a number of Bible passages commonly cited by those who do not believe in eternal security. It would be impossible to address them all here individually. When interpreted consistently and correctly, each of these passages can be understood in a way that harmonizes with eternal security. First, they must be interpreted faithful to the context which considers the eternal state of the readers and the purpose of the author. Second, they must be consistent with the over-arching plan of God to bless us eternally by His grace. Third, they must harmonize with the consistent teaching of justification by grace through faith alone apart from works or any other merit. Fourth, some of these passages are referring to the loss of reward, not eternal life. Fifth, some of these passages are conditions for discipleship, not eternal life.

What about providing a license to sin? The most common objection to eternal security is that it is a convenient excuse to sin. After all, the objector would say, if a person is guaranteed eternal life, then he can do whatever he wants without fear of consequence. But this argument is weak for a number of reasons. First, an argument from a hypothetical or real (though rare) experience, does not determine the truthfulness of a doctrine. Second, while some who hold to eternal security may sin and excuse it, the same is true for those who reject eternal security. Third, the nature of salvation by grace is that it teaches the believer to deny ungodliness and to live for God (Titus 2:11-12). Fourth, new birth results in a new person with a new capacity for spiritual things. There is a new relationship with God (Romans 6:1-5), a new freedom not to sin (Romans 6:6-14), a new life (Romans 6:11; Ephesians 2:1), and a new perspective and orientation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Fifth, the Bible teaches that there are severe consequences and loss of rewards for believers who live sinfully (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10), which is one motivation to live a godly life.

Some Implications The eternal security of the believer (the objective reality that one possesses eternal life) is a separate issue from the assurance of the believer (the subjective realization that one possesses eternal life). However, if one does not believe in eternal security, then inevitably there will be occasions when that person loses his assurance. There are also those who may profess to know Christ as Savior, but they do not possess eternal life and therefore have no eternal security and only a false assurance. The doctrine of the eternal security of the believer in Christ ultimately rests in the character of God who is faithful to His Word, and also in the freeness of His grace.

02.25. A Maze of Grace

GraceNotes - no. 25 by Dr. Charlie Bing A Maze of Grace

Those who use the Bible authoritatively do not dispute the clear biblical statement "by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8). But universal affirmation does not necessarily mean universal agreement about how we are eternally saved. That depends on how one defines grace. When the meaning of grace is changed, the condition for salvation is also changed. So exactly what does grace mean when it comes to our salvation? If grace means something other than the absolutely free and unconditional gift of God received through faith, then it must involve human effort. At least that is what many have said in one way or another. But in their "maze of grace," grace is anything but amazing. Here are a few of the more common twists and turns foisted upon grace:

Common corruptions of grace.

Jehovah's Witnesses. The JW's New World Translation usually translates grace as "undeserved kindness." How far does this kindness extend? In a discussion titled "What Must We Do to Be SAVED?" (on their official website, www.watchtower.org), we see the implications of their understanding of grace: "Salvation is a free gift from God. It cannot be earned. Yet it does require effort on our part." Here we have an echo of Ephesians 2:8 that conflictingly depicts grace as something that cannot be earned yet requires our effort!

Mormonism. A visit to the official website of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (www.mormon.org) finds this statement: "Grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts." In the Book of Mormon, we read "for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23b). This obvious parallel to Ephesians 2:8 takes a strange twist. We find that after all, grace is help that is given only after we have made our best effort.

Roman Catholicism. On the official Vatican website (www.vatican.va) we read these statements: "Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God" (emphasis theirs). "It is received through baptism and other sacraments. . . . we can merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for . . . the attainment of eternal life." "Grace is the help God gives us to respond to our vocation of becoming his adopted sons." Note that grace is only undeserved help so that we can merit more grace to attain eternal life.

Different religions are not all that different! Grace is not totally free and unconditional, but only a reward or boost added to our own efforts. In these views, it must be earned or merited rather than received through faith.

Costly or cheap?

Unfortunately, even Bible-believing evangelicals get lost in the maze. Many have adopted the terms "costly grace/ cheap grace" coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a German Lutheran theologian/activist). One author writes, "While it [grace] is free, it is not cheap" (John F. McArthur,

The Gospel According to Jesus. Revised & Expanded, p. 65). So grace is free - but not cheap; it must be costly. But how can grace be free if it is costly - or cheap, for that matter? When we read Bonhoeffer and these others, we see that "costly/cheap" are adjectives mistakenly applied to the concept of grace itself, when what they are really talking about is how a Christian may respond to God's grace (with behavior that reflects appreciation for God's grace or with behavior that depreciates it). But there is already biblical language for an unworthy response to grace. The Bible states that grace can be received in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1); set aside (Galatians 2:21); insulted (Hebrews 10:29); and fallen short of (Hebrews 12:15). This biblical language expresses an incorrect response to free grace without impugning the pure concept of grace itself, which is the unfortunate result of using terms like "costly grace/cheap grace."

Biblical free grace The Bible can use the word grace to mean "favor" in a general sense, or in the New Testament epistles even use it as a greeting coupled with "peace." But when speaking of God's salvation from hell and deliverance from sin, the Bible is very clear about the meaning of grace. One clue to its meaning is found in the original word for grace (*charis*), which is the root of the word translated gift (*charisma*). Consider the unequivocal meaning of grace in these verses:

Ephesians 2:8-9. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." We learn from this that saving grace does not originate with us, but God, and that it is exclusive of our works (effort) as part of the overall gift of God's salvation. Since it can not be earned, it can only be received through faith.

Romans 3:24. "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The grace that saves (justifies) is absolutely free, because Jesus already paid in full the price (the essential meaning of "redemption") for our sins.

Romans 4:4. "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt." In a discussion on justification, the Apostle Paul explains that any works nullify grace and produce a situation of debt and obligation, not gift.

Romans 11:6. "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work." Grace and works are mutually exclusive. Grace excludes all concept of merit; it is not a reward or boost to human effort.

Conclusion

There is a confusing "maze of grace" encountered in religious commentary. But when we let the Bible speak for itself, it does not cloak or confuse the pure grace of God that saves us. Saving grace is not a reward for human effort, nor is it a power-assist for our own human effort. Grace is not works, nor is it merited. Grace is not costly, nor is it cheap. It is a totally free and unconditional gift of God bestowed on those who in no way deserve it. It is the gift of eternal life given to lost sinners who have absolutely no merit of their own before God, and who can only receive the gift through faith. That understanding keeps grace amazing.

02.26. Suicide and Salvation

GraceNotes - no. 26 by Dr. Charlie Bing Suicide and Salvation A commonly asked question is whether a born-again believer who commits suicide will still go to heaven. The answer to this and other related questions depends on the biblical data and one's view of God's grace. Is suicide a sin? The Bible teaches that human life is sacred. Suicide is the taking of a life that is uniquely created, made in God's image, and given as a gift. The commandment "You shall not murder" does not specify an object and can include oneself as well as others. In principle then, suicide is equal to murder; it could be called self-murder. (Giving one's life to help another would not be suicide - it is considered the ultimate act of love. John 15:13) For the Christian, suicide is also the taking of a life that does not belong to him or her: Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you are bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) This passage has the Christian's physical body in view, as indicated by the surrounding context which discusses sexual immorality and the body. Does suicide bring eternal destruction?

Some think that 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 teaches that suicide is punished with eternal destruction. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. In this view, the "temple of God" refers to the physical body. Also, the word "defiles" is sometimes translated "destroys" (as it is in the next phrase), which is how some get the idea of suicide. But a better translation of this word may be "ruins" or "corrupts." Furthermore, the context of this passage shows that "temple" refers to the community of believers who comprise the local church, not the human body. The analogy of a building is used for the church in the previous verses (1 Corinthians 3:9-10). The passage then is a warning for those who would try to ruin or destroy the local church - a real threat presented by the problem of divisiveness in Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:3-4). God's punishment will destroy or ruin these worldly believers. This could refer to their loss of rewards (1 Corinthians 3:15) or their physical harm (1 Corinthians 5:5) including death (1 Corinthians 11:29-30; cf. 1 John 5:16). This passage does not say anything about suicide. Does suicide prove that one was never saved?

Some would say that a person who claims to be a Christian and commits suicide just proves that he or she was never really a Christian at all. But there is no evidence in the Bible that those who have believed possess anything less than eternal life, which by definition cannot be lost. This view often assumes that all Christians persevere in faithfulness and obedience until the end of their life, but biblical evidence disproves that (e.g. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 11:30). Can a believer commit suicide? The Bible shows that believers are capable of terrible sins, even murder (e.g. King David). Believers can abuse the grace of God. Suicide, though terrible, is another sin that a believer can commit. According to the Bible, all of the believer's sins are forgiven (Colossians 2:13). That is why there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1) and nothing can separate a believer from the love of Christ, even death - death from whatever cause (Romans

8:35-39).

What happens if one dies with unconfessed sin? The Bible promises that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). But a believer who commits suicide cannot confess that sin. Yet the truth is every believer will probably die with some specific sins not confessed. Besides, 1 John 1:9 relates to the believer's fellowship and walk with God, not the condition for obtaining eternal salvation (cf. 1 John 1:3, 1 John 1:6-7). Confessing each and every sin is not a condition of eternal salvation. The only condition is faith in Christ and His offer of eternal life based on His finished work of paying for our sins on the cross. Christians can be assured that when they sin, they have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who satisfies God's justice for all of our sins (1 John 2:1-2).

How does grace apply to suicide?

Since God is omniscient and by His grace forgives all sins, past, present, and future, there is no sin that will surprise God or make Him regret having saved someone. The Bible also teaches that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more (Romans 5:20). No one can out-sin God's grace! Knowing this, a Christian should never presume upon God's grace by committing any sin, much less suicide. Suicide is a selfish and serious sin that dishonors God, hurts other people, and deprives God of one's service on earth. Any abuse of God's grace has its consequences - a qualitative loss in this life and in the eternal experience as well. But that loss is in the quality of one's fellowship or enjoyment of God, not in one's relationship to God.

Conclusion A realistic view of humanity admits that Christians can sin severely, even to the point of committing suicide. But a realistic view of the Bible admits that God's grace is great enough to cover even the worst of sins. Suicide is a grievous and tragic sin, but Jesus died for such sins. This is by no means an encouragement to sin or commit suicide; rather it is another motivation to worship and serve a God who is so gracious.

02.27. Sharing Grace Graciously

GraceNotes - no. 27 by Dr. Charlie Bing Sharing Grace Graciously

Those who claim to know God's grace must speak and act graciously toward all. Jesus was described as "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He proclaimed truth in such a way that people "marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:22) and His conduct was gracious as well.

Like Jesus, we must share the truth of grace graciously so that this wonderful message will not be tarnished, undermined, and even contradicted by ungracious words and conduct. How can we be gracious as we seek to proclaim grace? We will be more gracious when we understand and reflect in word and deed what is inherent to the concept of grace itself.

Grace is humble. The grace we experience as Christians removes all grounds for boasting because it is an absolutely free gift unmerited by anything we are or do. It keeps us from having an inflated opinion of ourselves (Romans 1:1). Instead, we should reflect the sentiment of the Apostle Paul who said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Since our new identity and position is given by grace, we claim no inherent virtue or value over others. Grace admits a sinful past and an imperfect present. We should proclaim clear truths vigorously, but as we descend the spectrum of Scriptural clarity, we must humbly admit that our understanding is less than perfect and deal graciously with those who have a different understanding.

Grace is liberating. Grace has freed us from bondage to the law and legalistic demands (cf. Galatians 5:1-13). A legalistic spirit tyrannizes people with arbitrary and artificial expectations that stifle Christian growth, but a gracious spirit allows them to grow to become more like Christ. A gracious attitude toward others frees them to be what God wants them to be instead of demanding that they become what we or others might want them to be. America is called a free country because people are allowed to think, question, converse, debate, disagree, or object. Likewise, Christian graciousness creates an environment that allows people to reach their fullest potential without fear of censorship or condemnation.

Grace is risky. When God gave us everything for nothing and guaranteed our future he took a chance, a chance that we might abuse His blessing - as some surely do. Believers can use the grace that liberates as "an opportunity for the flesh" (Galatians 5:13). Grace can be abused, set aside, or rejected (e.g., 2 Corinthians 6:1; Galatians 1:6; Galatians 2:21, Galatians 5:4, Hebrews 12:15). When Jesus chose His twelve disciples, He risked entrusting His message and reputation to men who were unproven in character, untrained in doctrine, and uncouth in manner. A gracious attitude toward people sees the potential that God sees in them and is willing to trust God to bring it to realization.

Grace is patient. The Scriptures tell us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). That growth is a process in which grace teaches us (see Titus 2:11-12 where the word for teaching is one related to the training of children). Since God has

designed spiritual maturity to be a growth process, He bears with our imperfections as we progress. God is like a patient parent waiting for a child to mature. We likewise acknowledge that fellow believers are in a developmental process; they are not a finished product. Each stage of growth has its expectations, which differ with each person. We exhibit graciousness when we allow others the room and the time to become more Christlikeness in understanding, character, and conduct.

Grace is encouraging. The biblical idea of encouragement implies the help of one who comes alongside of another to support or strengthen them in time of need. Someone with a gracious disposition reaches down to help others and lift them up (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9). A gracious spirit does not unlovingly criticize, condemn, discourage, or suppress someone so as to hinder their growth. Grace purposes not to defeat others, but to boost them toward Christlikeness. Someone has said that grace holds a halo over our head and helps us grow into it. We are more likely to grow when others expect and encourage us to become what God has made us in Christ. A gracious spirit reflects love in that it "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7), i.e., it believes the best about others and optimistically helps them with a forbearing spirit. Graciousness gives others the benefit of the doubt in matters of conscience and conduct that are less than absolutely clear.

Grace is kind. It bestows on another thoughtful and helpful goodness (cf. Ephesians 2:7). Kindness is more than doing or saying something good, as reflected in the little girl's prayer, "God, help all the bad people be good, and all the good people be kind." A gracious spirit considers the feelings of others and deals gently with them with good will and a helpful intention.

Grace is forgiving. We demonstrate the kind and loving nature of God's grace when we grant forgiveness to those who offend us (cf. Ephesians 4:32). The New Testament idea of forgiveness contains the idea of release. When we forgive those who hurt us, we release them from being the target of our resentment. It is a gracious act to absorb the pain of an offense without returning it, as Jesus did with those who caused His painful death.

Conclusion In an attempt to advance the message of God's grace, it would be tragic if an ungracious spirit undermined the credibility of that message and even turned people away from it. That would be a disgrace. Just as we can not teach the love of God with a scowl, so we can not advance grace without a gracious spirit to all who are inside and outside the family of God. We who so dearly treasure the truth about grace must be gracious in sharing it. When we are, people will be attracted to our message. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6).

02.28. Can Good Works Prove Salvation?

GraceNotes - no. 28 by Dr. Charlie Bing Can Good Works Prove Salvation?

There is every reason to think that those who have believed in Jesus Christ as Savior and are consequently born into God's family will experience a changed life to some degree. Some would say that this changed life is evidenced by good works which proves they are saved. If that is true, then the converse is true: if there are no good works, then there is no salvation. In this view, good works (sometimes called "fruit" or evidence of a changed life) prove or disprove one's eternal salvation.

Some passages are used to contend that works can prove or disprove one's eternal salvation. Probably the most common are James 2:14-26, John 15:6, and Matthew 7:15-20. But James is writing to Christians about the usefulness of their faith, not its genuineness. Likewise, in John 15:6 Jesus is talking about fruitless believers and compares them to branches that are burned, in other words, not of much use. Matthew 7:15-20 warns against false prophets (not believers in general) who can be evaluated on the basis of their evil deeds or heretical teaching (not an absence of works in general).

There is no passage of Scripture that claims works can prove salvation. In fact, there are many problems with trying to use works to prove salvation, or the lack of works to disprove salvation.

Good works can characterize non-Christians. Works in and of themselves can not prove that anyone is eternally saved because those who have not believed in Christ will often do good things. In fact, good deeds are essential to many non-Christian religions. Sometimes the outward morality of non-Christians exceeds that of established Christians. In Matthew 7:21-23 we see the possibility of those who do not know Christ doing great works, but their works are useless in demonstrating their salvation; they are not saved.

Good works can be hard to define. Though we might define a good work as something done by a Christian through the Spirit for the Lord, how can we always know when that is true? It is hard to imagine even a single day when a Christian (or non-Christian, for that matter) would not do something good like go to work to provide for a family, hold a door for someone, or brake for a squirrel. How can we know when these things are done through the Spirit and for the Lord, especially if they can be done by non-Christians?

Good works are relative. While a person's behavior may seem excessive, it may actually demonstrate great progress in that person's Christian growth. A man slips with a curse word that startles other believers, but those believers do not know that before his conversion, curse words flowed freely. The amount of fruit must be considered in the context of one's total past life, a difficult thing to do. It may also be relative to the amount of sin in one's present life. For example, if a Christian were to commit adultery, we might focus our thinking on that sin so that we ignore the other good things he is doing.

Good works can be passive in nature. The fruit of salvation is not always what we do, but often what we do not do. As a Christian, one may no longer get drunk or may refrain from yelling at an inconsiderate motorist. This fruit of the Spirit, self-control, may not be detected by others because of its passive nature.

Good works can be unseen. In Matthew 6:1-6 Jesus told his followers to give and pray in secret rather than publicly. A person who never prays in a group may breathe a prayer while driving and no one will ever know. Another may not attend church, but give regularly to a Christian charity. These are works that go unobserved by others.

Good works can be deceptive. Since we can not know one's motives, a seeming good work could be done for the wrong reason. A person might give money to a church to impress others. Another might volunteer to work with church children only to wait for an opportunity to sexually abuse them. These are not actually good works at all! Motives are difficult to discern, even for the doer, but God knows each person's heart (1 Corinthians 4:3-5)

Good works can be inconsistent. The Bible allows the possibility of believers who begin well, but fall away from their walk with the Lord or fall into sin (1 Corinthians 11:30; 2 Timothy 4:10; James 5:19-20). If a Christian shows the evidence of a changed life, but later falls away, at what point in their life do we examine them to prove or disprove their salvation? If there can be lapses in good works, how long does the lapse continue before one is judged as never saved?

Conclusion

Nowhere does the Bible teach that fruit or good works can prove one's eternal salvation. Since the fruit of good works is not easily discerned or quantified, it can not be reliable proof of salvation. The subjective nature of measuring one's fruit creates the impossibility of knowing objectively whether someone is saved. The amount of fruit necessary to please one Christian "fruit inspector" may not please the next "fruit inspector." As Christians, we are created in Jesus Christ to do good works (Ephesians 2:10) and expected to do good works (1 Timothy 6:18; Titus 2:7, Titus 2:14; Hebrews 10:24), but good works are never attached to the condition for salvation, which is faith alone in Christ alone (Romans 4:4-5). While good works can be corroborating evidence for one's faith in Christ, they are not sufficient to prove or disprove it. Only faith in God's promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ guarantees and proves our salvation.

02.29. How Good Do You Have to Be to Get to Heaven?

GraceNotes - no. 29 by Dr. Charlie Bing How Good Do You Have to Be to Get to Heaven?

Many people have the idea that if they do enough good, or don't do too much bad, then God will allow them to enter heaven. In other words, when it comes to obtaining eternal life, they think God grades on a curve. This assumption is built on some erroneous thinking.

First, this way of thinking does not understand that God's standard of goodness is absolute. If someone could obtain eternal life by being good, by keeping God's laws, or by making any kind of commitment, then his or her performance would have to be perfectly good as God is perfectly good. Jesus Christ taught that no one is absolutely good but God (Matthew 19:17; Romans 3:9-12). Many people have a relative concept of goodness, that is, they look at others to see how their own goodness compares. Of course, they find that they are better than some and worse than others. But other people are not the standard of heaven; God Himself is.

Second, it is a mistake to think that man's best is good enough. The Bible teaches that a person's best efforts to obtain eternal life are not worthy of God's acceptance (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:20; Ephesians 2:8-9). A person would have to keep God's standards (as reflected in His laws) perfectly and could not fall short of even one aspect or command (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10). There is always room to do better or to be more committed, so even one's best performance is not good enough.

Third, it is a mistake to think that man's problem is simply his conduct. No one can obtain eternal life by outward behavior, but only by believing in Jesus as Savior from sin. The Bible teaches that sin, not sins per se, keeps unsaved people from experiencing God's life. Sins are the result of a sinful condition, much like a cough and runny nose are the result of a cold. While we might treat the symptom of the problem (the cough), the cure must deal with the cause or condition (the cold). Unsaved man's problem is first his sinful spiritual condition in which he is dead to God (Romans 3:18; Ephesians 2:1). Thus changing or improving one's conduct does not deal with the problem that keeps an unsaved person from having eternal life and entering heaven.

Fourth, it is a mistake to ignore what God has already done for us. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to do what no other person could do. Since every unsaved person's efforts to do good or be good are tainted by sinfulness, someone had to satisfy God's demand for justice on each person's behalf. Only Jesus could do this, because as God the Son He was without sin and perfectly acceptable to God. Jesus took every person's sin upon Himself and paid the price of death for all (2 Corinthians 5:21). Then he offered everyone the gift of eternal life, which can be received through faith (John 1:12; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9). To think that we must perform something insults God and His perfect gift as inadequate.

Conclusion No one can hope to have eternal life by being better than others or by being good enough. No one's works, law keeping, performance, commitment, reformation, repentance from sins, abstinence from sin, baptism, church attendance, sincerity, or good intentions is good

enough for heaven. The only hope is to accept what God has already done by believing in Jesus for eternal life. If eternal life comes from what He did and not from what anyone does, then no one can do anything to become acceptable to God.

Salvation by grace means that eternal life does not come by human effort or performance; it is a gift from God. Through Jesus Christ, God accomplished everything necessary for anyone to have eternal life. Only those who believe His promise and therefore receive His life will enter heaven.

02.30. How Much Faith Does It Take to Save?

GraceNotes - no. 30 by Dr. Charlie Bing How Much Faith Does It Take to Save? The Bible promises that "whoever believes in [Jesus Christ] should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16) and says "by grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). But how much faith is necessary to obtain this salvation? A person may wonder if he or she has believed enough to be saved. No wonder - there are those who claim that salvation is given only to those who have enough faith, a full faith, a special faith, etc., implying that one's faith in God's promise of salvation can be insufficient.

Different amounts of faith

We know that faith can vary in degree or amount because of biblical testimonies. Jesus spoke of those with "little faith" (e.g., Matthew 6:30; Matthew 8:26, Matthew 14:31) and those with "great faith" (e.g., Matthew 8:10; Matthew 15:28). The man whose son was healed of an evil spirit had a small amount of faith, but asked for more (Mark 9:24). Jesus spoke of a faith as small as a mustard seed, the smallest agricultural seed known in those days (Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6). In the case of the man with the weak faith, it is clear that even the small amount he had was enough to see Jesus' miracle. Jesus Himself said that a mustard seed amount of faith was able to move a mountain or transplant a tree. This indicates that the amount of faith is not the issue; the issue is the object and the power that the faith accesses.

Faith and its object

First, it should be noted that the Bible's promises of eternal life which mention faith or believing do not specify how much faith is necessary to obtain eternal life. (Acts 8:37 may look like an exception when Philip tells the Ethiopian eunuch that he can be baptized "If you believe with all your heart," but Acts 8:37 is not in many important Greek manuscripts and is therefore omitted in many English translations. Even so, the eunuch's answer, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" shows that the amount of faith is not the critical issue; rather, the issue is the object of faith.) Second, it is not actually our faith that saves us. When we look at Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith," we can differentiate between the cause (by grace) and the means (through faith). For example, if someone said that he washed his car with a hose, we understand that the hose was the means through which the cause of washing (water) was delivered. The hose did not actually wash the car, but the water did. Faith itself is not a force, but a channel through which God's power to save is delivered.

Third, the smallest amount of faith is sufficient for salvation if the object of that faith is worthy. Since it is God's grace that saves us in Jesus Christ, any amount of faith in Him will save. For example, someone who is drowning might have strong faith in a leaky boat that can not save her, or she could have weak faith in a seaworthy boat that can save her. The weakest faith is enough to save if it is in a worthy object. Some people have an enormous amount of faith in a false religion or in a false religious leader, but they will not be saved. The believer with the smallest amount of faith

in the worthy Son of God will be saved, because salvation does not depend on the strength of one's faith, but on the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to do what He promises.

Conclusion

Examining the quality or amount of one's faith is a subjective exercise in futility. Salvation and the assurance of salvation only come by focusing faith on the worthiness of Jesus Christ and His promise to save. The issue is not how much we believe, but what we believe in. We either believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life, or we don't.

02.31. Water Baptism and Eternal Salvation

GraceNotes - no. 31 by Dr. Charlie Bing Water Baptism and Eternal Salvation

Many issues relating to water baptism could be discussed, but the most important issue is whether it can obtain eternal salvation. Does a person have to be baptized in water in order to have eternal life? The significance of baptism The word baptize means to dip or immerse. Immersion best fits the biblical evidence (John 3:23; Acts 8:36-39) and best pictures the spiritual immersion of the believer into Christ's body (Romans 6:3-4). This spiritual baptism at the moment of belief invests the believer with new and eternal life. Water baptism, which can occur any time later, pictures that spiritual transaction which unites the believer with Christ in His death and resurrection. A baptized believer publicly declares that he is a new person in Christ and now belongs to the body of Christ. The importance of baptism

Jesus commanded that those who believe should be baptized and it is the expected norm for believers in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12, Acts 10:47-48, Acts 16:14-15, Acts 16:31-33). It is not presented as an option subject to one's preference, but neither is it ever given as a requirement for salvation. The only condition for salvation The clearest statements of Scripture declare that eternal salvation is by grace through faith alone in Christ alone (John 3:16; John 6:47; Ephesians 2:8-9). Since grace means a free undeserved gift, any act or commitment intended to merit salvation is necessarily excluded (Romans 11:6). Faith is the persuasion that God's promise is true, therefore it also excludes any deed or commitment because it simply accepts what has already been promised and paid for (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8-9). When we say that our faith is in Christ alone, we mean that Christ did all that was necessary to accomplish our salvation and we can add nothing - no commitment, no act of obedience, no good work - to gain our salvation. We should therefore understand controversial passages on baptism in light of the clear scriptural teaching that faith alone in Christ alone obtains eternal life.

Some misunderstood Bible passages on baptism

John's baptism. John the Baptist came to baptize unto repentance (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). His baptism called the Jewish people to prepare themselves for the coming Messiah by repenting of their sins and their associations with apostate Judaism. That his baptism was not unto salvation is clear from Acts 19:1-5 where his disciples were told that they had to believe in Jesus Christ to receive the Holy Spirit.

Mark 16:15-16. It is disputed whether the end of Mark (Mark 16:9 ff.) was in the original New Testament. Assuming it for the sake of argument, Jesus commands the disciples to preach the gospel saying, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." But He then makes the only condition of condemnation "he who does not believe" (Mark 16:15), not "he who does not believe and get baptized." Baptism is not a condition for salvation or condemnation.

John 3:5. There are a number of interpretive options for the meaning of "born of water and of the Spirit," but if the context is considered, baptism is certainly not the best. Some take water as a

reference to physical birth, since that is what Nicodemus asked about (John 3:4). It may be better to take water as a reference to the Holy Spirit ("water, even the Spirit" or "water, that is, the Spirit") since spiritual birth is the focus of the ensuing discussion (John 3:6-8) and something that Nicodemus, as Israel's teacher, should have known was promised in the New Covenant (John 3:10; cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27; Isaiah 44:3; See also John 7:38-39; Titus 3:5).

Acts 2:38. Several interpretations of this difficult passage deny the necessity of baptism for eternal salvation. Perhaps the one most consistent with the text holds that these Jews had believed when they were convinced of Peter's message, as is clear from their grief and their question "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Repentance and baptism was Peter's prescription urging these new Jewish believers to identify with the Christian community in order to escape the imminent judgment coming upon their sinful generation for crucifying Christ (Acts 2:40). Forgiveness of this sin (not their eternal salvation) was conditioned on the repentance signified by their baptism. Their repentant baptism was also the condition for receiving of the Holy Spirit for these Jews in this transitional period. Later, Gentiles received the Spirit immediately upon believing in Christ (Acts 10:43-44; Acts 15:7-9).

Romans 6:3-4. It is very clear in this passage that Paul is speaking of the act of Spirit baptism which places (immerses) all who believe into the body of Christ. This Spirit baptism was predicted by Christ (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5) and is essential to all believers (1 Corinthians 12:13).

1 Peter 3:21. In light of 1 Peter 3:20 which states that Noah and his family were saved through water because they were in the ark, so also believers are figuratively saved through the water of baptism only because they are in the resurrected Christ. In the context, these believers who faced suffering can be saved from a guilty conscience, which would come from denying their faith, by publically identifying with Christ through baptism (cf. 1 Peter 3:16).

Conclusion

Other arguments could be cited to show that baptism does not obtain eternal life: Paul didn't see baptism as part of the gospel, and with a few exceptions, he didn't make it part of his ministry (1 Corinthians 1:14-17); The thief on the cross was guaranteed a place in paradise without baptism (Luke 23:40-43); Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit (and thus salvation) before their baptism (Acts 10:44-48). But the most crucial argument against baptism as a condition for salvation comes from the nature of God's grace which is the basis of eternal salvation. His grace is always free and unmerited and only obtained through faith in Jesus Christ.

02.32. Future Grace

GraceNotes - no. 32 by Dr. Charlie Bing

Future Grace In the New Testament, grace is usually mentioned as something in the past for those who have been saved through faith, or something that can be appropriated in the present for Christian living. However, there are some passages that state or imply a future experience of God's grace. What does this mean for those of us who have believed? The scope of God's grace

God's grace initiated our salvation before time (Ephesians 1:4-6). His grace brought us salvation when we believed in Jesus Christ as Savior (Ephesians 2:8-9). His grace also helps us grow in our relationship to God (Acts 20:23). But the Bible says that grace is also a part of our future experience. God's grace is so great, so pervasive, that it encompasses all of the Christian's experience from beginning to end. The fact of future grace

1 Peter 1:13 speaks of grace that awaits the Christian in the future: "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Several things emerge from this verse. First, there will be a future experience of grace. Second, grace will be experienced at the revelation of Jesus Christ, which speaks of the time He will return for His church. Third, this future grace is a basis for hope and encouragement. Another passage that speaks of future grace is Ephesians 2:7. We have God's promise "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The need for future grace

Why would a believer need grace in the future? We believe God's grace is important in our past to justify us, and in the present to sanctify us, but why is it needed in the future since an eternity with God is guaranteed (Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30)? A likely need in the future will be for a measure of God's forgiving grace and mercy at or after the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ is a doctrine that pervades the teaching of the New Testament. At the judgment seat of Christ believers will give an account for the things they have done in this present life. Some passages promise rewards for faithfulness and good works, but some passages indicate at least a loss of rewards for unfaithfulness or misconduct (e.g. Matthew 12:36; Matthew 16:27, Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11; James 2:13; James 3:1; 2 Timothy 4:8). We could all certainly use more grace in the future when we account for our lives. The application of future grace

It is clear that the believer's conduct, whether good or bad, has future consequences at the judgment seat of Christ. But how does each believer's judgment balance out since virtually everyone has done both good and bad things? Does one sin (or two, or three . . .) however large cancel out the rewards for all the good done? Most believers could cite things from their lives that deserve rewards, but also things that would negate rewards. Only God can and will make the final judgment. The apostle Paul did not trust his own assessment of his motives, much less that of others. He was willing to leave the final assessment to Christ at His judgment seat: But it is with

me a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. (1 Corinthians 4:3-5)

There are certainly many warnings of negative judgment that should cause Christians to be concerned. While it might be a fearful thing to think of eternal consequences for our times of unfaithfulness (2 Corinthians 5:11), in the end, our Judge is the same "God of all Grace" (1 Peter 5:10) who saved us in the first place. We have not exhausted His grace, because where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more (Romans 5:20). Forgiveness for our sins is "according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Who can measure how much God's grace abounds or how rich it is?

Conclusion

While a future accounting for our lives at the judgment seat of Christ is a clear biblical teaching, it is less clear exactly how the good and bad that we have done will be assessed and recompensed. There is comfort in the fact that there will be much needed grace for us in the future. In spite of our sin, unfaithfulness, and misconduct, "each one's praise will come from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5). This is not an excuse to sin, but a reason to worship!

02.33. The Extent of God's Forgiveness

GraceNotes - no. 33 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Extent of God's Forgiveness And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14 This passage says that God has forgiven believers all their trespasses, or sins. Does all include every kind of sin no matter when it was committed? Some believers think that Jesus forgives them certain kinds of sins or only sins they committed before they were saved. The implication is that certain sins or future sins could cause them to lose their salvation. Does salvation by grace promise more?

Grace covers all sin

If God does not forgive all kinds of sin no matter when they are committed, then His grace would be limited. But this passage teaches us that forgiveness comes with a new life and that condemnation for sin was wiped away on the cross. The word used for forgiveness in Colossians 2:13 comes from the same word used for grace, which means a free gift. God's forgiveness is freely given. It is not only free, but it is abundant. Romans 5:20 teaches that "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." God's grace so exceeds all of our sin that no matter what we do or when we do it, our eternal standing with God is secure. We can not out-sin God's grace and forgiveness.

All means all

Therefore, in Colossians 2:13, the word "all" means exactly that. It means that Jesus has forgiven every sin, no matter how terrible. It also means he has forgiven all sins whether past, present, or future. Some may have trouble accepting the fact that God has forgiven even future sins, but we must realize that all of our sins were future to Jesus Christ when He paid for them on the cross. Jesus knew the sins we had committed in our past and forgave us anyway when He died on the cross. Likewise he knew the sins we are yet to commit and he forgave us anyway on the cross.

Jesus paid it all When Jesus said from the cross "It is finished," He meant "paid in full." God's just penalty for our sins was completely satisfied in the death of His own Son. Nothing else could have been an acceptable payment or an eternally sufficient payment. Christ's death was sufficient for all sin and for all sinners everywhere and anytime. That is why there is no longer the need to offer sacrifices for sin (Hebrews 10:1-18).

We must maintain fellowship forgiveness

We should realize that there are two kinds of forgiveness in the Scriptures. Colossians 2:13-14 addresses judicial forgiveness of sins which would keep us from God's presence. There is also fellowship forgiveness of sins that would hinder our experiential walk with God. We are forgiven judicially the moment we believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life (at justification). We are forgiven

experientially when we confess subsequent sins to God on a moment by moment basis (1 John 1:9). If we do not confess our sins on an ongoing basis, we may hinder our experiential fellowship with God. Though we can never lose our salvation, we can lose the joy of our salvation, much like a disobedient son would not cease to be in the family, but could have a fractured relationship with his father.

We need God's eternal perspective

It helps to see the sins in our life as God has seen them. Our view is limited to the present moment; the past is a memory and the future is only a possibility. But since God is not confined to time (He is infinite), He views our life in its totality. When God forgave our sins, he saw what we did in our past, what we are doing in our present, and what we will do in our future - and He forgave us anyway!

Conclusion

God did not save us only to regret it, because He was not surprised by anything we have done or will do. When Jesus died for our sins, God had our entire life in view. He did not give us eternal life only to take it back when we do something bad. He already knew what sins we would commit as believers, but forgave us anyway. This should cause us to live worshipfully with gratitude, not in licentiousness. Grace teaches that our guiltless position before God depends on His promise of forgiveness, not on our performance. However, the quality of our subsequent fellowship with God depends on constant confession of our sins as we become aware of them. When God forgave our sins, he saw what we did in our past, what we are doing in our present, and what we will do in our future - and He forgave us anyway!

02.34. Hebrews on Fire

GraceNotes - no. 34 by Dr. Charlie Bing

Hebrews on Fire The warning passages in Hebrews are notoriously difficult to interpret. Many have trouble accepting that the warnings were written to believers because of the severe judgments which are threatened, especially the mention of fire, which for many evokes the imagery of hell. Proof that the author of Hebrews wrote to believers in Christ is overwhelming (See GraceNotes no. 15, "Interpreting Hebrews"). Since the warnings are to believers, they could not be threatened with hell, for believers can not lose their salvation (See GraceNotes no. 11, "Eternal Security"). What then do the three references to fire in the warning judgments (Hebrews 6:8, Hebrews 10:27; 12:31) mean to believers?

Fire used in judging God's people

Fire signifies many things in the Bible, including hell, but by no means should fire automatically be interpreted as eternal hell fire. Fire is often used in reference to God's people. Sometimes it is the fire of God's wrath that disciplines His people (Numbers 11:1-3; Isaiah 9:19; Isaiah 10:17, Isaiah 29:6, Isaiah 42:25; Jeremiah 11:16; Jeremiah 15:14; Jeremiah 17:4; Lamentations 2:3-4; Lamentations 4:11; Ezekiel 22:20-22; Amos 2:5; Obadiah 1:18; Psalms 78:21; Psalms 80:16). Sometimes it refers to a cleansing or purifying trial or judgment (Psalms 66:12; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2; John 15:6; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 1 Peter 1:7). It was used to picture God's jealousy for the devotion of His people (Deuteronomy 4:24; Psalms 79:5; Zephaniah 1:18; Zephaniah 3:8). Fire is also associated with the work of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11/Luke 3:16; Acts 2:3).

Fire used in the warnings of Hebrews

We will restrict this study to that which pertains to fire in the warnings of Hebrews, though many other interpretive details would support that fact that the fire mentioned is not eternal hell fire. Notably, eternal fire, eternal torment, hell, and Gehenna are never mentioned in the warnings.

Hebrews 6:8

Using an analogy, this warning compares someone who falls away from the Christian faith with earth that receives rain and produces thorns and briars instead of fruit. Such earth is "rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned." The word "rejected" (adokimos) means to be disqualified and is used of believers in the New Testament in reference to losing future rewards (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27), but is never used of hell. This earth (unfruitful believers) is disqualified from usefulness and the accompanying benefits. Note also that the earth is near to being cursed, not actually cursed. This denotes the seriousness of the apostasy (Hebrews 6:6), but stops short of a total rejection. When it says that the earth is to be burned, one correctly pictures the thorns and briars being burned off the earth, because earth itself cannot burn. Thus it pictures a fire of judgment and/or purging that burns up that which is useless (cf. John 15:6; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15). These believers were in danger of becoming "sluggish" (Hebrews 6:12), and such spiritual

lethargy would be useless to God and others. God's disciplining judgment has the purpose of making believers holy and fruitful (Hebrews 12:10-11). There seems to be an intended relationship of this warning to Isaiah 5:1-7 which warned Israel that God would burn her for being an unfruitful vineyard. The warning of Hebrews 6:1-20 shows that believers who do not go forward with their faith squander God's blessings so that what is produced is not useful but useless and fit only to be discarded, or burned.

Hebrews 10:27 The believer who sins willfully (note that the author includes himself as a possibility by using "we") has in store "a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which devours the adversaries." The willful sin in Hebrews is turning back to sinful Judaism which would be tantamount to giving one's approval to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

We first note that God's discipline of believers can be fearful. In Acts 5:1-42 when Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead by God because they lied, "great fear came upon all the church" (Acts 5:11). One judgment Christians face is the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10) which can be a fearful prospect for those who have not lived well (2 Corinthians 5:11). The "fiery indignation" (literally "fiery zeal") is that "which will devour the adversaries." This could either mean that the judgment that sinful believers face is of the kind of zealous judgment God intended for His adversaries, or it could mean that the zealous judgment God uses against His adversaries will be used against believers. We have seen how fire was used against God's people in the Old Testament, so either meaning is possible. The "worse punishment" of Hebrews 10:28 is compared to those who were executed for breaking Moses' law. Is there a punishment worse than death? Absolutely (cf. Lamentations 4:6, Lamentations 4:9). Suffering in this life can be so terrible that some people kill themselves to find relief. That this is a judgment on God's people is made clear in Hebrews 10:30 by the quote from Deuteronomy 32:35-36 : "The Lord will judge His People." Furthermore, Hebrews 10:31 says "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," but at least they will be in His hands. Finally, the contrast between "destruction" (apoleian, or "ruin") and "saving of the soul" (literally, "preserving of the life") in Hebrews 10:39 could speak of physical life and death or contrast a ruined life with a life that is delivered from the consequences of a negative judgment. This warning which mentions fire is meant to picture the terrible consequences that believers face if they should willfully turn away from Jesus Christ. The consequences are spiritually devastating, even more painful than death, but eternal hell is not mentioned. The readers, Hebrew Christians being tempted to re-identify with sinful Israel, might also understand this as a warning about the impending national judgment of a fiery destruction of Jerusalem which occurred only a short time later (A.D. 70), something they would know about from Jesus' warnings (Matthew 23:27-39, Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6; cf. Acts 2:40).

Hebrews 12:29 That "our God is a consuming fire" is a motivation to practice gracious godly reverence in God's service, which was mentioned in the previous verse (Hebrews 12:28). It is not meant to be a threat of hell, because Hebrews 12:28 speaks confidently of the readers "receiving a kingdom" in the future. This metaphor of God as a consuming fire comes from Deuteronomy 4:24 where it speaks of God's jealousy.

Conclusion The judgment of fire in Hebrews refers to God's discipline which can be very severe. Such discipline will be meted out in this life in the form of painful experiences. It is very possible

that the fire here would be understood by these Hebrew Christian readers as the fiery destruction of Jerusalem which happened a short time after this book was written, a judgment on Israel for rejecting and crucifying Jesus Christ. In any case, believers don't need to fear burning in hell, but they will experience God's burning anger if they willfully turn away from the benefits of the eternal salvation which Jesus Christ provided through His death and resurrection.

02.35. Does Free Grace Teach License?

GraceNotes - no. 35 by Dr. Charlie Bing Does Free Grace Teach License?

Those of us who teach that grace is absolutely free are sometimes accused of teaching license or antinomianism. License is the belief that a Christian can do anything he or she wants, including sin, without negative consequences. Antinomianism is the belief that there are no laws for the Christian life.

What it means to teach grace as free To teach free grace means teaching that grace cannot in any way be earned, merited, worked for, or deserved. In salvation, this means that eternal life or eternal salvation cannot in any way be earned, merited, worked for, or deserved. Therefore, those who teach free grace in salvation reject any conditions of merit, works, or performance attached to the gospel both in its offer and in the new life that results. That is, eternal salvation cannot be obtained by our performance, nor can it be kept by our performance. The accusation of license When we teach that there is nothing a person can do to obtain or keep eternal salvation, some accuse us of making good works or faithful conduct totally irrelevant, and thus it is said we teach license and/or antinomianism. The accusation sounds like this: "You are teaching that a person who has believed in Jesus Christ can do anything he or she wants and still be a Christian? The gospel demands obedience and a life that is governed by laws in the Bible. A person who is not obedient or who practices lawlessness was never or cannot continue to be a Christian."

Such an accusation is in one sense a very good thing. It is evidence that we are teaching grace as it is defined biblically - absolutely free. Being accused of teaching license or antinomianism is not a new charge; the Apostle Paul was evidently accused of the same when he taught that Christians are "not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14; cf. Romans 6:1 and Romans 6:15), so we are in good company. The early church fought against those who tried to add the Old Testament law as a principle for eternal salvation and the Christian life (Acts 15:1-41; Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25; Galatians 2:1-21, Galatians 3:1-29, Galatians 4:1-31, Galatians 5:1-26). But the early church also fought against those who perverted grace into a license to sin. (Romans 3:8; Romans 6:1-23, 1 Corinthians 6:12, 1 Corinthians 10:23; Galatians 5:13-26; 2 Peter 2:18-19; Jude 1:4). Those who teach free grace in the biblical sense teach that Christians are no longer under the Old Testament law and they also oppose licentiousness. Not under law but under grace That is the pronouncement of the Apostle Paul (Romans 6:14). He meant that since the Old Testament law was fulfilled by Jesus Christ (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:19-25), we do not have to satisfy its commands to obtain eternal salvation or live the Christian life. That does not mean that we are without any laws. The New Testament speaks of a new law for Christians, the law of Christ, some of which echoes the Old Testament laws (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2). But unlike the Old Testament law, it is a "law of liberty" (James 1:25; James 2:12) which is inscribed on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10). The charge of antinomianism would only apply to someone who rejects all laws, those of both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Under grace we fulfill the law of Christ as we walk according to the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 8:1-11) or walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25).

Why teaching free grace is not teaching license

First, grace is absolutely free by definition. To put any conditions on obtaining it or keeping it contradicts what grace is. Grace conditioned on our performance ceases to be grace, so there is no other way to teach grace except that it is absolutely free.

Second, while grace is free, it does teach moral responsibility. Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and live godly lives (Titus 2:11-14). To live under grace means we should live a righteous and holy life (Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39; Ephesians 2:8-10). All grace teachers should teach the moral admonitions of the Bible.

Third, teaching grace should motivate us to live for God who has blessed us freely by His grace. Experiencing and understanding God's grace should generate a heart and life of worship and gratitude to God for His undeserved free gift (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:1).

Fourth, those who teach free grace should also teach that believers who sin face God's discipline. Like a good and loving Father, God does not let His children run wild (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Fifth, those who teach free grace should teach that every believer will have to give an account of his or her life before the judgment seat of Christ where there will be both positive and negative consequences. When we die or when Christ comes, we will each face this reckoning that has consequences into eternity (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Conclusion

We who teach free grace properly do not teach license or antinomianism. We teach that grace is given freely apart from our performance. Grace has freed us from the requirements of the Old Testament law and has placed us under the new law of Christ which we fulfill when we live by His Spirit. Grace liberates us not to serve our own sinful desires, but to serve God and others. Grace can be abused - that is always a risk of freedom - but those who do so invite God's discipline and other negative consequences. However, when we appreciate the high price God paid for our free gift of eternal life - His only Son - we should have a heart of worship and gratitude that leads to spiritual maturity and godly living.

02.36. Should Romans 6:23 Be Used in Evangelism?

GraceNotes - no. 36 by Dr. Charlie Bing Should Romans 6:23 Be Used in Evangelism? For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. This well-known verse is often used when presenting the gospel to show that unsaved sinners will pay for their sin with eternal separation from God (death), and that they can escape that fate through the gift of eternal life that Jesus Christ provides. Is that how this verse should be interpreted and applied?

Context, context, context

Having addressed initial justification and its benefits in Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-21, Romans 6:1-23 has moved on to a discussion of the Christian life. Romans 6:23 is a conclusion or summary of the preceding thoughts in Romans 6:1-22. This chapter is clearly written to believers who were baptized into or united with Christ (Romans 6:3-5), who have died with Christ, and now live with Him (Romans 6:6-11). The admonition to these believers is not to serve sin but God, because they are no longer under sin's authority, but under grace (Romans 6:12-14). In Romans 6:15 an imaginary objection is raised about whether being under grace might encourage believers to sin. While Romans 6:16-23 grants the possibility that believers can choose to sin, it also gives reasons why believers should not serve sin. Simply put, sin leads to death (Romans 6:16, Romans 6:21), while serving God leads to righteousness (Romans 6:16) which leads to holiness (Romans 6:19) which leads to everlasting life (Romans 6:22). Actions that meet God's standards (righteousness) set believers apart in a closer experience with Him (holiness) and a fuller experience of His life which they already possess as a gift (everlasting life). It is hard to escape Romans 6:23 as a summary word to believers. The application to believers

Since Romans 6:23 is written to those who are believers, we must understand why they are told that sin leads to death, or better, that sin pays off ("wages") in death. In light of other affirmations about their eternal security in Romans, this can not mean that believers who sin will lose their salvation and be separated from God in hell (cf. Romans 4:16, Romans 8:18-39).

It is biblical and crucial to understand death here in the sense of separation rather than cessation. Someone who is physically dead does not cease to exist; they are just separated from their earthly bodies. On the spiritual level, death for unbelievers means they are separated from God's life now and potentially forever. For example, Adam was told that in the day he ate of the forbidden tree he would die (Genesis 2:17). When he ate he did indeed die, but he did not die physically or cease to exist. He died spiritually in the sense that he was separated from God's eternal life in his present experience and potentially forever.

Death for believers means they are separated from the benefits of God's life in their present experience. Believers have eternal life as a present possession and a future promise. They can not be separated from the possession of eternal life either in the present or future, but they can be separated from its experiential benefits (e.g. peace, joy, power over sin, etc.). When believers sin, they live in the same kind of experiential effects that sin produced when they were unsaved

(Romans 6:19-21), the experience of shame and spiritual deadness.

While the initial possession of eternal life comes at the moment of justification through faith in Christ (Romans 3:24, Romans 5:18), the enjoyment or ongoing experience of that life is the fruit of godly living. Eternal life is sometimes described as a relationship with God (John 17:3). Jesus Christ, with whom we are risen, has given the free gift of His life to us who believe and manifests that life in us as we live for Him. The application to unbelievers A faithful interpretation of this verse in its context acknowledges that it was written to believers to admonish them not to serve sin, but God. But does this verse apply to unbelievers in any way? Though summarizing an argument to believers, Romans 6:23 is stated as a general principle that can be applied to all people whether saved or unsaved. The verse applies to unbelievers in the sense that they, in their sin, are dead to God. The solution to their separation from God is the free gift of eternal life that comes through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 3:22-26). Both believers and unbelievers can experience death, and the only solution for both is the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Though Romans 6:23 is written specifically to believers as a conclusion to an argument for them to live for God not sin, the summarizing principle is stated broadly enough to inform unbelievers who are still in their sins that their only expectation is total separation from God both positionally and experientially now and forever. It can be used effectively in a gospel presentation to show the consequences of not believing in Christ. However, believers should not overlook the primary purpose of the statement, which is to move them to serve God and not sin. Believers have been given a wonderful gift of God's life which they can only enjoy as they live for Him.

02.37. Interpreting 1 John

GraceNotes - no. 37 by Dr. Charlie Bing Interpreting 1 John

Interpreting 1 John is troublesome to some because of statements that appear to be tests or conditions. The prevailing view among commentators is that the purpose of these tests is to determine if someone is saved eternally or not. Another view, not as common, is that the tests do not determine one's eternal salvation, but one's experience of fellowship with God. Are the tests of 1 John intended to examine one's eternal relationship to God or examine one's intimate fellowship with God? The answer has important ramifications for one's understanding of the gospel and consequently, one's assurance of salvation. The tests are spread throughout the epistle. Here are some examples of the conditions stated in these tests:

1 John 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 2:9 He who hates his brother is in darkness.

1 John 3:8 He who sins is of the devil.

1 John 3:10 Whoever does not practice righteousness or love his brother is not of God.

1 John 3:14 He who does not love his brother abides in death.

1 John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God. The purpose of the epistle Our understanding of the tests must agree with the purpose of the epistle. A number of times in 1 John we read "these things I [or we] write [or have written] to you..." (1 John 1:4, 1 John 2:1, 1 John 2:26, 1 John 5:13). It would be natural for any author to put the purpose statement for the entire book at the beginning (The references in 1 John 2:1, 1 John 2:26, and 1 John 5:13 seem to refer to what immediately precedes each of those statements). If so, then 1 John 1:4 declares that the purpose of the book is to bring the readers into the full joy of a shared fellowship with the apostles and with the Lord (1 John 1:3). Fellowship (literally "sharing") refers not to the establishment of a relationship, but to growing more intimate in that relationship. In other words, John's purpose is not to establish a new relationship, but to enhance an existing one. It seems obvious that the readers already had established a relationship with John and the apostles, just as they also had established a relationship with God. It appears John wrote to protect the readers' experience of fellowship with him and his apostolic circle and with God because false teachers among them denied that the readers possessed eternal life (cf. 1 John 2:25-26, 1 John 5:13), which of course would undermine any existing fellowship with the apostles and with God. The experiential tests then address the quality of this horizontal and vertical fellowship. But for assurance of their eternal life, John directs the readers to the promise and testimony of God (1 John 2:25; 1 John 5:9-12). The existing relationship of John to the readers and their relationship to God are demonstrated in how John addresses the readers in endearing Christian terms. He calls them little children (e.g., 1 John 2:1, 1 John 2:18), children whose sins are forgiven (1 John 2:12),

children of God (1 John 3:1-2), and fathers (1 John 2:13-14). John also includes himself with the readers in their common Christian experience ("we" in 1 John 3:1-2, 1 John 5:14, 1 John 5:19-20). The readers also had the anointing from God (1 John 2:20, 1 John 2:27). They already had a relationship with God because they had believed in the Son of God (1 John 5:13). Even in the statement of some of the tests, the saved state of the readers is indicated by the use of the Christian designation "his brother" (e.g., 1 John 2:9, 1 John 3:10, 1 John 3:14-15). A theological concern

If John was making his readers' conduct the test of their salvation, then there is an unavoidable theological problem in that faith alone in Christ alone would not be the condition for salvation. It would instead be faith in Christ plus confirmatory good conduct. This of course compromises the gospel of God's free grace clearly taught in the Scriptures (Romans 3:21-25, Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Salvation is either by grace through faith or it is by works, not by any mix of the two (Romans 4:4-5; Romans 11:6, 1 John 5:1) Salvation conditioned on tests of conduct destroys the possibility of one's assurance of salvation. When we look at the tests, we recognize that none of us keeps them all, or keeps any of them perfectly. As long as that is true, then doubts will remain about whether we are saved or not. Doubts in any relationship are incompatible with deeper intimacy in that relationship. For example, intimacy in marriage is built on the security of unconditional love and acceptance which encourages each spouse to open up to know the other and to be known. If John were posing reasons to doubt one's salvation, he would be defeating his purpose stated in 1 John 1:3-4 to enhance deeper fellowship with the apostles and with God.

References to intimacy When one recognizes John's purpose for writing, there is a rich reward. The epistle leads believers into a deeper more intimate knowledge of God. The terms which some regard as references to salvation ("in the light/in darkness, knows God/does not know God, of God/of the devil, abides in God/abides in death") should better be seen as references to a source or an orientation rather than an absolute state. It describes believers experientially rather than positionally. The tests let the readers know whether they are growing toward God in intimacy or heading away from Him. A more detailed explanation of these references must await a future study.

Conclusion The tests of 1 John address a believer's experience. If properly understood, they lead the readers into a more intimate relationship with God Who is already known through their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The book's purpose is not to establish their relationship with God, but to deepen the relationship that they already have. Taken in this way, 1 John does not lead believers into insecurity about their relationship to God, but enhances their desire to be more intimate with Him.

02.38. Giving a Clear Gospel Invitation

GraceNotes - no. 38 by Dr. Charlie Bing Giving a Clear Gospel Invitation

Because the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only message that can save people, we want to be as clear as possible in explaining how someone can have eternal life. Once we have shared the good news of who Jesus is and what He has done for us through His death and resurrection, we should invite people to believe in His promise of eternal life. But a clear gospel explanation can be undone by an unclear invitation. When we explain that Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to provide us salvation, we do not want to give any impression that anything else must be done. Only by believing in Jesus Christ for eternal life are we saved. Here are some invitations and practices that will confuse people who need only to believe.

Give your heart (or life) to God. The issue in salvation is not what we give to God, but what He gives to us - eternal life (John 4:10). This invitation better reflects the issue in sanctification. It is a good exhortation to the Christian on how to live for and serve God. But it will confuse the unbeliever.

Make Jesus the Lord of your life.

...or Put Jesus on the throne of your life. Surrender (or commit) your life to Jesus as Lord.

While these invitations recommend something commendable for the Christian, they do not speak to the non-Christian. They assume that an unbeliever understands enough about God's will to make a decision to give Christ control of all areas of his life. Second, they do not speak to the issue in salvation, which is believing in Jesus Christ as one's Savior from sin and Giver of eternal life. To believe is not to surrender, yield, or commit one's life to Christ; it is to be convinced that Christ's promise to give eternal life is true for the one who trusts Him for it.

These invitations fall short of what is required for eternal salvation. They also offer no assurance of salvation because of the impossibility of knowing if Jesus Christ is indeed the Master of all of one's life. The Bible teaches that our obedient surrender to God is a response to God's saving grace, not a requirement for it (Romans 12:1; Titus 2:11-12).

Ask Jesus into your heart.

...or Open the door of your heart. Invite Christ into your heart (or life).

These three invitations reflect a misunderstanding of Revelation 3:20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me." A couple observations about this verse: 1) Jesus doesn't say he is knocking at the door of one's heart. More appropriately, Jesus is knocking at the door of the Laodicean church to whom this letter is addressed. 2) Because they are a church, the issue is not eternal salvation, but restoration of fellowship between Christ and the church, or individuals in the church. Eating together is a common biblical picture of fellowship (Acts 2:42, Acts 2:46).

Though these invitations recognize the heart as the essence of our being, the issue of believing in Jesus Christ for eternal life is hardly communicated. The issue in salvation is not us inviting Jesus Christ to do anything. Rather, it is He who invites us to believe in Him. Finally, the imagery of a door to the heart or the spatial concept of Jesus dwelling in the heart organ could easily confuse young children who tend to think in concrete terms.

Repent of your sins.

While it could be argued that when one believes in Christ he repents (changes his mind) about a number of things (e.g., his sinful condition, who Jesus is, what Jesus offers, that the offer is true for him), repentance in the sense of turning from all sins is not a condition for eternal salvation. Not only does this confuse the root (change of mind) with the fruit (change of conduct), but it makes one's conduct a condition for salvation. We are not saved by what we do or no longer do, but by believing. A person could turn from their sins and yet not be saved because they have not believed in Christ.

Confess your sins. This can be very confusing to an unbeliever. How many sins need to be confessed? What about sins which can not be recalled? Some might even think they would have to go to a priest. The word confess means to agree with. One can agree with God that he has sinned, but that is not enough to save him. The sinner must agree with God that He has provided for his sin's penalty through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, and that He will then give him eternal life. And that is exactly what it means to believe in Jesus Christ as one's Savior.

Receive (accept) Jesus Christ as your Savior.

There is some biblical support for this language (John 1:12; Colossians 2:6), but receiving Christ in these passages describes the result of believing in Him, as the contexts show. "Accept Christ" is not used in the Bible for believing in Christ.

Pray this prayer. This can give the impression that a certain prayer is necessary for salvation. But prayer is not the condition for receiving eternal life. If someone is willing to pray a prayer that expresses their belief in Christ as Savior, then it stands to reason they have already believed in His promise of eternal life. A prayer expressing this faith or thanking God for His gift would be appropriate, but the distinction between this and what it means to believe should be made clear. No prayer or any other practice or ritual can save.

Come forward. At least two false impressions can be left by an invitation to "come forward" in a church or Christian meeting. First, one could think that the physical action of coming forward is what saves. Second, one could think that the public confession of Christ is what saves. Neither one is the biblical condition for salvation. If someone is willing to go forward in a church or publicly confess Christ as their Savior, then they have obviously believed in Him already.

Conclusion So where does this leave us? We are left with the Bible's own language. The invitation in the Bible is to believe in the finished work of Christ for eternal life. After explaining who Christ is and what he has done for us, we might ask an unbeliever, "Do you believe this?" We may have to explain that believe means to be convinced or persuaded that what God promises is true, and that "This promise is true for you." But it is only believe. Nothing could be simpler or clearer when we

give an invitation to the gospel.

02.39. How Do We Explain Hebrews 6:4-8

GraceNotes - no. 39 by Dr. Charlie Bing How Do We Explain Hebrews 6:4-8 This passage is often used to argue against the doctrine of eternal security. It is argued that those who "fall away" (Hebrews 6:6) from the Christian faith will be cursed with eternal hell fire (Hebrews 6:7-8). On the other hand, some who believe in eternal security argue that this passage does not describe true Christians or that the danger is only hypothetical. When we examine the details of the passage in context, we find a better interpretation. Those who hold to eternal security should know how to explain these verses to others. The state of the readers

It is very clear that Hebrews is written to Jews who have believed in Christ. There is no indication that the writer switches at any point in his epistle to address unbelievers or mere professing (not possessing) believers (see GraceNotes no. 15, "Interpreting Hebrews: Beginning with the Readers"). More importantly, the immediate context is obviously addressing Christians: They should be teachers (Hebrews 5:12); they are babes in their spiritual status (Hebrews 5:13); they should go on from their foundational beliefs to maturity (NKJ "perfection," or "completeness," from teleiotes; Hebrews 6:1-2); they are qualified by a list of obvious Christian descriptions (Hebrews 6:4-5). The purpose of this negative warning is to encourage the readers to go forward in their profession of Christ instead of turning away from it (Hebrews 6:11-12). The all-important context The immediate context is neatly bracketed by a concern that the readers are "dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11) and might become "sluggish" (Hebrews 6:12). The author reminds them that they should have grown to be teachers by now (Hebrews 5:12). This supports the recurring exhortations in Hebrews to press forward in Christian faith and growth (Hebrews 3:6; Hebrews 4:14, Hebrews 10:23, Hebrews 12:1), because these Jewish believers were tempted to return to the sacrificial system of the Mosaic law in order to avoid persecution (cf. Hebrews 2:1-4; Hebrews 3:12, Hebrews 10:19-39, Hebrews 12:1-4). The historical context is probably the persecution of Christians under Roman emperor Nero. Forming the other "bookend" to the passage is Hebrews 6:11-12 which is also an exhortation to grow and press on in their faith. The meaning of "fall away" To "fall away" is interpreted by some as apostasy from Christian beliefs or a total denial of the Christian faith. A similar word and thought is seen in Hebrews 4:11, which refers to the example of the sin of rebellion against the Lord which happened at Kadesh Barnea (cf. Hebrews 3:12; Numbers 14:1-45). The argument and context of Hebrews suggests that this is a falling away from their profession of Christ (Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 10:23-25, Hebrews 10:35-39) which would be the case if they returned to the Mosaic system of animal sacrifices. In the grammar of the original language, falling away is not treated as hypothetical. Other Scriptures show that believers can harden their hearts to the point of abandoning their faith (Luke 8:13; 1 Timothy 1:19; 2 Timothy 2:18). The consequences of falling away The first consequence of falling away is that it is impossible to renew those believers to repentance. Those who say this passage teaches that Christians can lose eternal life must admit that it also teaches it is impossible for them to repent so as to be saved again. They would have no second opportunity to be saved. A better interpretation is that believers who had already repented (changed their minds) about the "dead works" of the

Mosaic system (Hebrews 6:1; cf. Hebrews 9:14) can not do that again because they knew better. In the past, they had rejected the Jewish sacrifices and accepted the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To go back and identify with Judaism is to publicly deny the benefits of Christ's sacrifice and even show implicit agreement that Christ deserved to die, thus the statement in Hebrews 6:6 : "since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." With such an attitude it is impossible to bring them back to repentance. These believing readers could make a pivotal decision not to press forward but to deny the provision of Christ's sacrifice and thus forfeit the benefits of professing and growing in Christ. If they do, they can not claim ignorance and start over. Again, this alludes to the pivotal incident at Kadesh Barnea mentioned in Hebrews 3:7-19 in which those Israelites who decided to turn back were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, though they tried (cf. Numbers 14:1-45). The author later uses Esau as an example of one who could not have another chance though he "sought it diligently with tears" (Hebrews 12:15-17). The second consequence of falling away is a negative judgment described in Hebrews 6:7-8. If God cuts off the opportunity to press on (Hebrews 6:3), the believer will suffer severe consequences. A believer who turns back would be like scorched earth. The imagery of fire unnecessarily leads some to interpret this as hell, but that is a poor conclusion because fire is often used as God's judgment on His people (see GraceNotes no. 34, "Hebrews on Fire"). The believer is compared to the earth which can either bear useful fruit or bear useless thorns; if useless thorns, the earth is "rejected" (NKJ; but *adokimos* is better translated "not standing the test" and thus "unqualified, worthless"). According to common agricultural practice, earth that bears useless thorns is set on fire to burn the thorns so that the earth might become productive in the future. It is important to note that in the original language there is only one earth, not two, and it (the believer) is not burned, but the thorns (what the believer produces). This judgment of God would be temporal since its goal is the productivity of the judged believer's life (cf. John 15:6).

Conclusion This passage does not teach that one can lose eternal salvation, nor is it addressing unbelievers or presenting a hypothetical situation. It addresses Hebrew Christians in danger of making a terrible choice to abandon their forward progress in faith to return to Jewish rituals. They would lose forever the progress they would have otherwise made and would suffer God's temporal judgment. This is a good exhortation and warning to Christians today. God wants us to faithfully press forward in our Christian faith. Though our eternal salvation is secure, there are severe consequences if we intentionally turn away from Him and do not go on to maturity. We will not only forfeit the progress we could have made, but face God's fiery chastisement intended to make us more useful in the future.

02.40. The Content of the Gospel of Salvation

GraceNotes - no. 40 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Content of the Gospel of Salvation When sharing the gospel clearly we should have two great concerns. First, we should be absolutely clear about the condition of salvation - believe. That belief must be free from any works, commitment, or idea of merit on our part so that grace remains grace. The second concern is that we should be clear about the content of the gospel, or what has to be believed. The content of the gospel is the person and work of Jesus Christ, which are inseparable as the object of saving faith. The Person of Jesus Christ

We are saved by Someone, the Lord Jesus Christ. Not just any Jesus, but the One sent from God who is the Son of God. There are many things implied by the designation Lord Jesus Christ such as deity, humanity, and messianic mission. While someone may not comprehend a full-blown Christology, there must be some understanding of Jesus' uniqueness and divine authority. The Gospel of John, recognized for its evangelistic intent (John 20:30-31), emphasizes the deity of Jesus more than any other Bible book (e.g., John 1:1-3, John 1:14, John 1:18, John 5:17-21, John 6:69, John 7:38, John 8:19, John 8:58, John 10:30, John 20:28). In John the person of Jesus Christ is the object of faith in many evangelistic contexts (e.g., John 1:12; John 3:16, John 5:24, John 6:29, John 6:47, John 9:35-37, John 11:25-26). The Provision of Jesus Christ As the Son of God, Jesus saves us by what He did for us; He provided for our greatest need. We are after all, saved from something and to something. As sinners separated from God, we needed someone to pay the penalty that we could not pay. Jesus paid that price by dying on the cross. Of course, a dead savior could save no one, so Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection shows that the price has been paid, that God accepted the payment, and that He lives to give us eternal life. Jesus made it possible for us to pass from death into life if we accept His provision (John 5:24). The person of Jesus can not be separated from His work. Jesus is the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He gave His life for us (e.g., John 6:51; John 10:11-18) as the supreme sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 10:5-10). Isaiah 53:1-12 speaks prophetically of Jesus' substitutionary death (Isaiah 53:3-12) and His resurrection (Isaiah 53:10-12).

Again, there are many deep and profound intricacies surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection which an unsaved person may not grasp immediately. Yet it seems there must be at least the simplest understanding that we are sinners separated from God, that Jesus removed the barrier caused by that sin through His death and resurrection, and that He now lives to give us His life. That is why we see the preaching of the cross and the resurrection in the early church (e.g., Acts 2:23-24, Acts 2:36, Acts 3:18-20, Acts 4:2, Acts 4:10, Acts 5:29-31, Acts 10:39-40, Acts 13:29-30, Acts 17:3, Acts 26:22-23) and why those great facts were reiterated in the epistles (e.g., Romans 3:1-31, Romans 4:1-25, Romans 5:1-21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, Romans 8:1-39, 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Galatians 3:1; Ephesians 1:20; Php 2:8-9; Colossians 2:12-14; Hebrews; 1 Peter 1:3, 1 Peter 1:18-21, 1 Peter 3:18). The Promise of Jesus Christ

It is certainly conceivable that a person can understand the facts about the person and work of Christ and yet not be saved because he does not apply them to his own spiritual condition. We believe Christ for something, and that is eternal life. God has promised us that whoever believes in Jesus Christ as the One who died and rose again will have eternal life (e.g., John 1:12; John 3:16, John 5:24, John 6:40, John 6:47, John 7:38, John 10:26-29, John 11:25-26, John 12:44-50, John 20:31). A person must believe, or be persuaded, that the promise is true and true for himself.

Eternal life has many implications that a person may not fully comprehend. It encompasses eternal security, forgiveness of sin, justification, new birth, glorification, and other wonderful truths that will become clearer with instruction in God's Word. Eternal life is also defined as knowing God through Christ (John 17:3). A person must believe God's promise for some salvific aspect of this eternal life.

Some Unknowns

While the gospel's content is essentially simple and we can share it clearly, questions may remain about certain situations: How does a very young child understand the gospel's content? How can a mentally impaired person be saved? What happens to babies who die without any knowledge of the gospel? How does a Hindu understand the concepts of God, sin, Son of God, resurrection, eternal life? When we share the gospel, we must realize that the communication process has two components, the communicator and the one who receives it. Not always does the listener process the information exactly as the communicator means it. In other words, there are barriers in communicating the gospel such as language, cultural interpretation, attentiveness, clarity, processing, pre-understanding, and religious preconceptions. In light of these unknowns, we must humbly acknowledge that a person's understanding may not always be what we think it is. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit knows what we do not. While it is our responsibility to share the gospel as clearly as possible, it is His work to convince (convict; John 16:8) the hearer of its truthfulness. As we share the gospel, we must depend on the Holy Spirit to work in the hearer to give enough understanding to bring about faith (Romans 10:14-17). Exactly how the Spirit works in a person's understanding will always remain somewhat a mystery (John 3:8; John 6:44-45, John 6:65). None of this, however, takes away from the fact that if we are wrong in our message, the listener will be wrong in his faith.

Conclusion

We are called to share the gospel of salvation which means that we share the person, provision, and promise of Jesus Christ. Why would we share anything less? Whether we explain it in the most basic terms or in great depth, it is always the Holy Spirit who brings the understanding which prompts faith. We preach the gospel of grace through faith alone in Christ alone and allow God to do the rest. Certainly that requires us to communicate it clearly, but also to pray fervently.

02.41. The Lordship of Jesus Christ

GraceNotes - no. 41 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Lordship of Jesus Christ

Jesus is Lord. No one who believes the Bible denies that. But what does that mean and how does Christ's lordship apply to our salvation and our Christian life? The Meaning of Lord The word usually translated Lord in the New Testament is the Greek word Kyrios. It is sometimes used as a title of respect, much as we would call someone sir. We see this in Acts 16:30 when the Philippian jailor addresses Paul and Silas as "Sirs" (the plural, kyrioi).

Lord is also commonly used as a title with the name Jesus Christ. As a title, it not only shows respect, but also reflects who Jesus is. He is the Lord. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew name for God, YHWH, was usually translated Kyrios, or Lord. YHWH conveyed first of all deity, but implied all the other aspects unique to deity such as Creator, Owner, Ruler, Judge, Redeemer, and Savior. The Lordship of Christ in Salvation The Lordship, or deity of Jesus Christ, is essential to our salvation. Consider some of the things that Jesus did for our salvation only because He is the Lord God:

He became the perfect sacrifice for our sins, without spot or blemish.

He gave His life as a sacrifice for all mankind - past, present, and future.

He rose from the dead to live and offer us eternal life.

He promises, provides, and secures the eternal life of all who believe in Him.

It is only because Jesus is in the position of Lord God that He can save us and gives us eternal life. While Lord speaks of His position of deity, the name Jesus speaks of His humanity and role of Savior, because Jesus means Savior. In the name Jesus Christ, Christ means Messiah, the One anointed or chosen by God to be the Savior and King. So Lord is a title that primarily conveys Jesus' deity. What this means for salvation is that Jesus has the power and authority to save sinners because He is God. What this does not mean is that sinners can only be saved if they submit to Him as the Ruler of their lives. Ruler is only one subset of deity, and it is arbitrary to make that one divine function and position into a subjective demand. As the word implies, salvation requires a Savior. Jesus came to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Timothy 4:10) and He can because He is God. Sinners need a divine Savior.

It is one thing to say that to be saved a sinner must acknowledge the divine authority that Jesus has as God or as the Son of God. It is quite another thing to say that to be saved a sinner must submit to Jesus as the Ruler of his life. The first acknowledges Jesus' objective position and power as God, the second demands a person's subjective response to Him as Ruler. The Bible has examples of unsaved sinners who addressed Jesus as Lord without submitting to Him (e. g., John 4:11, John 4:15, John 4:19, John 9:36). To further illustrate, we could say that during World War II General Douglas MacArthur saved the Philippines. He was able to save them because he had the position and power of a four star general of the United States Army. To the people of the

Philippines, however, MacArthur was not their general, nor were they required to submit to him as their general. They only needed to accept the "salvation" that he offered them. The view called Lordship Salvation

There is a view that teaches a sinner must submit to Jesus as Ruler of his life in order to be saved. Proponents of this view call it Lordship Salvation, though it should be called Commitment Salvation or Submission Salvation since it emphasizes the unbeliever's subjective response to Jesus Christ as Ruler. Lordship Salvation confuses the objective position of Jesus as Lord with the subjective response to one aspect of His lordship - rulership. Not only does this view reflect poor theological method - soteriology should not be built merely on titles, but it contradicts the Bible's teaching of salvation by grace through faith. The grace that saves us is the free, unmerited, unconditional gift of God. Making a sinner's submission to Jesus as the Ruler of his life a condition for salvation destroys the grace of God which makes salvation a free gift that can only be received through faith (Romans 4:4-5; Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Lordship Salvation is also arbitrary because it only emphasizes rulership in the divine title Lord Jesus Christ. To be consistent, they should require sinners to accept Jesus as the Creator, Sustainer, Judge, Prophet, Priest, and King, because all these and more are aspects of His deity. Furthermore, they should demand acceptance of all that the name Jesus means, and all that the title Christ means.

Teachers of Lordship Salvation often derogatorily refer to those who believe in the freeness of grace in salvation as no-lordship, or non-lordship. Of course, this is incorrect and deliberately misleading. Their error comes from confusing the objective position of Jesus as the Lord with one's subjective response to Jesus as their Lord and making it a requirement for salvation. Those who believe in the freeness of grace believe that Jesus must be the Lord (God) to be Savior. The response required of an unbeliever is simply to believe the gospel - who Jesus is, what He has done for our salvation, and what He promises us. There is no lexical or biblical basis for defining believe as submit. Believe simply means to be convinced of something or persuaded that it is true. There are even biblical examples of those who had submitted to Jesus as their Ruler but were not saved (Matthew 7:21-23), and those who were saved when not submitted to Jesus as their Ruler (Acts 5:1-10; Acts 19:18-19).

We are not saying a person who comes to Jesus as Savior deliberately rejects the rulership of Jesus Christ. We are saying that to demand a sinner to submit to Him as Master is simply not the issue in salvation, much less is it reasonable to demand this of one who is spiritually dead. The Lordship of Christ and Sanctification

While we reject Lordship Salvation and its requirement that sinners must submit to Jesus as the Ruler of their lives, we enthusiastically embrace the term Lordship Sanctification or Lordship Discipleship because submitting to Jesus as our Ruler is what the Christian life is all about. Once we know Jesus as Savior, we must learn to relate to Him as our new Master.

Many passages admonish us who have believed in Jesus as Savior to now relate and submit to Him as Lord. The point of Romans 6:1-23 is that now that we have a new Master in Jesus Christ, we should submit ourselves to Him. Romans 12:1 urges us to present ourselves as "living sacrifices." We live and die to the Lord (Romans 14:8-9). As believers we are told to "sanctify the

Lord God" in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15) and to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Such admonitions would not be needed if we had already done all that in order to be saved.

Conclusion

We can not make Jesus Lord; He is the Lord! We can only submit to Him as servants. As our divine Savior He saves us; as our divine Master He sanctifies us. To keep the grace of the gospel free we must not confuse the faith required of an unbeliever for justification with the many aspects of submission required of believers for sanctification.

02.42. Is Faith in Jesus Christ a Gift of God?

GraceNotes - no. 42 by Dr. Charlie Bing Is Faith in Jesus Christ a Gift of God? A person is eternally saved through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but does God give this faith or is it purely a human response? Those who teach that faith must be given by God are usually constrained to do so by their theological perspective, as is true of Reformed theology. Their view of man's total depravity does not allow for any positive response from man toward God. They claim that if faith originated in man it would be a meritorious work that robs God of His glory. In their view, since God gives the faith that saves, that faith will sustain the believer in a life of obedience. But there are problems with viewing faith as a gift of God.

Theological problems with faith as a gift

Those who view faith as a gift interpret man's condition, described in Ephesians 2:1 as "dead in trespasses and sins," as a total inability to respond to God in a positive way. But that phrase describes man's total separation from God, not his inability to respond to God. Sinful man is totally separated from God and therefore without eternal life. Man retains the image of God to some degree; it was severely marred in the fall, but not totally destroyed. Acts 10:2 describes Cornelius before he came to know Jesus Christ as Savior as a devout man who feared God, gave alms, and prayed to God (and God heard his prayers! Acts 10:31). In Acts 17:1-34 the Athenians did not have the proper object of faith but worshiped idols. Paul encourages them to seek to know their "unknown God" which of course is Jesus Christ. Men can seek God in their unsaved state as God draws them (John 6:28-29, John 6:44-45).

Another theological problem with the view of faith as a gift of God is that it misunderstands the nature of faith. Faith is not (as they claim) a divine energy, a special power, or an infused dynamic. That confuses faith with the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith is simply faith. It means that one is convinced or persuaded that something is true so that there is a personal appropriation of that truth. There is not a special kind of faith for eternal salvation. There is only a special object of faith - Jesus Christ. The kind of faith one might have in Buddha is no different from the kind of faith that one can have in Jesus. The only difference is the object: Buddha does not save; Jesus saves. To make faith the power of salvation is to confuse faith with the Holy Spirit. According to Ephesians 2:8 grace is the grounds of salvation and faith is the means by which we appropriate that grace. Properly speaking we are not saved by faith, but through faith. To show that faith is not a meritorious work, the Bible contrasts faith in Christ with meritorious works in both Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 4:4-5. Faith means exactly that we can do nothing for our salvation. We can only receive salvation as a gift. Faith is like an empty hand that simply accepts a gift.

Exegetical problems The main passage used to support faith as a gift of God for salvation is Ephesians 2:8-9. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; [it is] the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast."

It is claimed that the demonstrative pronoun "that" refers to "faith" as a gift of God (the words "it is" are not in the original language, but are supplied by the translation as shown by the brackets). But "that" cannot refer to "faith" (nor to "grace") because in the original Greek it would have to be in the feminine gender. But "that" is neuter which shows that the best antecedent is the concept of salvation by grace. This fits the context which is governed by salvation by grace in chapter 1 and especially in Ephesians 2:4-9. There are other passages used to argue that faith is a gift of God, but they offer no support. For example, it is clear that some passages speak of faith as a special spiritual gift (Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 12:9) or simply as the opportunity to believe (Php 1:29), but not as a gift for salvation.

Logical problems On the surface the view that says God must give us faith to believe is a tautology. It assumes what it seeks to prove. In other words, this view claims we believe because God gives us faith. But if God give us faith, then we do not need to believe. Or if we can believe, then God does not need to give us faith.

Another problem with that view is its theology which says unsaved man is "dead" and cannot believe unless he is first made alive. Therefore God gives us faith as a divine life-giving energy that regenerates us so that we can believe. But if we have the divine life and are regenerated, we would not need to believe to have eternal life - we already have it!

Also, if faith as a gift is a divine power that sustains the believer in a life of obedience, then that obedience would be perfect and never interrupted by sin or disobedience. New Testament admonitions and commands to live righteously would be superfluous. But since believers do sin, it shows that their human response is a crucial aspect of their sanctification.

Finally, if we cannot be saved unless and until God gives us faith in the gospel, then God could not hold us responsible for not believing the gospel. But he clearly does (John 3:18, John 3:36, John 5:40).

Conclusion

It is hard to escape the conclusion that those who claim that God must give us the faith to believe for salvation do so out of a theological construct that is not validated by Scripture. Sinful man retains the image of God to the degree that he can have faith in either an unworthy or a worthy object for salvation. The only faith that saves is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Faith is not the gift; Jesus Christ is the gift. God can draw us to Himself (John 6:28-29, John 6:44-45), convict us of the gospel's truth (John 16:8), and invite us to receive eternal life (John 3:16; John 4:10, John 7:37), but it is our responsibility to believe the gospel for eternal life.

02.43. Grace Versus Karma

GraceNotes - no. 43 by Dr. Charlie Bing Grace Versus Karma

Billions of people in the world follow religious systems that teach the law of karma (for example, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism). Even many Christians reflect a popularized concept of karma in their thinking. How does karma compare to the biblical concept of grace?

What is karma? The word karma means action or performance. In its most basic concept, karma is the belief that our actions bring corresponding reactions. In more popular terms, we get what we deserve or "what goes around comes around." Some see karma as a natural universal law, whereas others allow for a deity to control or dispense the effects of karma. The consequences of one's karma may be experienced in this life or in a future life (as in reincarnation, the belief that we return to live again in another form).

Similarity with biblical truth

There are some similarities between karma and truths we find in the Bible. For example, the Bible teaches that God is just both in the sense that He punishes evil and rewards good. The book of Proverbs gives many principles that show good or bad actions bring good or bad consequences. Some point to Galatians 6:7 which says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (see the discussion below).

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that these consequences for our actions can be experienced in this life or in the next. In this life, bad actions can have negative consequences like hindering our fellowship with God and people, poverty physical illness, death, etc. Good behavior has the contrasting good consequences. Though the Bible does not teach reincarnation, it does teach that believers have a future life in the kingdom of God. Good or bad actions in this life can diminish or enhance that experience in the kingdom (Matthew 1:1-30; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 22:12).

Dissimilarity with biblical truth

Though some may think that the Bible approves the concept of karma, the dissimilarities are great. The Bible's teaching is vastly superior to the concept of karma. The Bible does not teach that the universe is locked into karma or any universal law. Yes, God did design the universe to operate by some basic principles of justice and retribution, many of which are mentioned throughout the Bible. But God can alter the laws He has created and is not a slave to those principles. Though He is just, He is also loving, and His love for us can supersede His justice toward us. When it comes to our salvation, "He made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin, to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God fulfilled His justice by exacting payment for our sins, but He did it through His Son dying in our place. That is contrary to what karma expects.

Because God loves us, and because His innocent Son satisfied His justice, God can give us His eternal life, His righteousness, and His forgiveness for all of our sins. By His grace through faith in His Son we are given what we do not deserve. While karma locks a person into a cycle of

retributive justice, God breaks that cycle with His grace. While karma guarantees that a person gets what he deserves, grace guarantees that a person can get what he does not deserve. By definition grace is a free gift that is not deserved. The Bible teaches that God's grace can break into the cycle of sin with blessing. For example Psalms 103:10 says, He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. And Romans 5:8 says, But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Conversely, God also allows bad things to happen to very good people. In the Old Testament Job is called the most righteous man on earth, yet he suffered horribly. In the New Testament God's perfect Son was unfairly condemned and crucified. God is free to act outside of His normal design. This upends the rigid dictates of karma.

Unlike reincarnation, which teaches that a person gets another life to improve his or her karma, the Bible does not teach that anyone gets a "do over" after this life. This removes any excuse to live irresponsibly now and postpone doing good things to another life. All people will be held accountable to a judgment that comes after they die (Hebrews 9:27) or when the Lord Jesus comes (John 5:28-29). For those who have not believed in Jesus Christ this is a judgment of their unbelief and evil deeds that earns them eternal damnation in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:13-15). For those who have believed in Jesus Christ this is an evaluation of their works at the Judgment Seat of Christ to see whether they are worthy of eternal rewards (Romans 14:10-11, 2 Corinthians 5:10). A closer look at Galatians 6:7 This passage clearly teaches that we reap what we sow. But several things should be noted. First, though it is stated as a divine principle, God has the freedom to override His own principles of retribution and reward. If He did not, no sinner could be saved.

Also, to be faithful to the context of Galatians 6:1-18, this verse is not discussing the condition for eternal salvation (that was discussed earlier in Galatians 3:1-29), but the consequences for Christians who live either according to the Spirit or the flesh (Galatians 5:21-26). The emphasis in the context is admonishment for Christians to do good works as they live under grace instead of law. If Christians live by the Spirit (not the flesh), they will have a richer experience of God's eternal life in the future (Galatians 6:8-9). This is not karma, but divine motivation and reward for personal responsibility.

Conclusion

Grace trumps karma. In karma there is no hope apart from what we can do for ourselves by our own effort. The Bible teaches and experience shows that we are sinful by nature and left to ourselves we will do evil, and thus deserve punishment. Grace, however, does what we cannot do. It gives us eternal life that we do not deserve and gives us God's Spirit to help us do good things. Anyone who is hoping in karma for a good life now or in the future should flee to Jesus Christ for His gift of grace.

02.44. Man's Aversion to Grace

GraceNotes - no. 44 by Dr. Charlie Bing Man's Aversion to Grace To those who have been profoundly changed by a clear understanding of God's grace it is often puzzling why more people, unsaved or saved, do not accept that message. After all, if grace gives us salvation and all its benefits absolutely free, why do so many unbelievers reject it and why do so many believers try to compromise it with conditions? It will help to see the biblical and historical pattern of this aversion to grace and then offer an explanation. A Pattern of Rejecting Grace The biblical history of God's chosen nation, the Jews, shows that they consistently rejected His provision for their spiritual needs. In Acts Stephen told how the Jews rejected Moses and the Promised Land and wanted to return to captivity in Egypt and worship a golden calf instead. About the calf idol Stephen said they "rejoiced in the works of their own hands" (Acts 7:39-41). Later, the Apostle Paul explained why the Jews rejected the gospel of grace: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3). The common denominator in Stephen and Paul's assessments is that the Jews rejected God's grace in favor of their own merits. The New Testament amplifies the same pattern of rejecting grace. Jesus was bitterly opposed and persecuted by the self-righteous Pharisees who insisted on stringent law-keeping for righteousness. Paul was opposed by legalists wherever he preached the grace message. Sometimes the Christians strayed shortly after Paul departed from them, as in Galatia (Galatians 1:6). Paul warned that enemies of the gospel would corrupt the believers from without and within (Acts 20:29-31), that is why he commended them "to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Countering legalism (defined here as the keeping of laws and rules to exalt self) was a common theme in Paul's epistles to the churches.

Church history since the New Testament shows that the free grace of God was corrupted before the church got out of its first century. Many early church fathers taught the necessity of baptism and a holy life in order to be or stay saved. For many centuries after the early fathers the dominate Orthodox and Catholic religions both taught the necessity of baptism, penance, and other sacraments for salvation. It was not until the Reformation in the early 1500's that Christianity reclaimed the free grace of God - though those Christians who did so were violently persecuted.

Even Calvin, a leader of the Reformation who taught that grace was free and faith in God's promise assures us of salvation, was shortly afterward reinterpreted to make works indispensable to one's assurance and salvation. By the time of the Westminster Confession (1647) works were solidly embedded into faith and the gospel, not on the front end (in order to be saved), but on the back side (to prove you were saved). Today a resurgence of this brand of Calvinism has swept through the Christian world with the same intrusion of works and merit into assurance and salvation. A Natural Response to Grace

Why hasn't the wonderfully liberating grace message swept the world? We can only suggest why so many people reject or pervert the free grace of God.

Conditioning.

We live in a world of un-grace that has always taught us we must earn our own way. We are promised rewards for potty training, good grades for studying hard, and a paycheck for working. Apart from biblical Christianity, every world religion offers salvation only through performance. Grace, which promises us salvation free and secure, sounds too good to be true. When Jesus told some curious Jews that eternal life was a gift, their natural response was "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God." Jesus did not concede to their inclination to work for salvation, but in a play of words responded "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:27-29). Ask an average person today how one can have eternal life and the prevailing answer will include something that must be done. Salvation that is truly free is difficult to comprehend or accept.

Pride.

Doing something to contribute to or prove our salvation appeals to the natural impulse of our pride. The gospel of free grace separates works entirely from the offer of salvation. We are saved by grace through faith "not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Pride appeals to our sinful flesh. The flesh likes to exalt self and boast of what has been done, but the gospel of grace points only to the cross as the means of obtaining and keeping salvation. Paul said, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 5:14). Grace humbles our pride.

Insecurity.

Doubtless there are some who are not comfortable with the freedom grace brings. The controversy in Acts 15:1-41 was caused by Jews who demanded observable performance-based criteria from the Gentiles who had been saved by grace. This reflects a desire to depend on a system of black and white laws or behavioral measurements that would make these legalists feel secure in their spirituality and reserves them the right to declare certain others unsaved. The insecurity of uncertainty about others can lead to a fear of ambiguity, which in turn can breed a desire to control. Control leads to the assertion of laws or measurements that make some feel comfortable. On the other hand, grace looks to faith in the Word of God, submission to the control of the Holy Spirit, and the compulsion to love God and others as that which determines one's spirituality. Grace is risky because freedom is always risky.

Conclusion

Man has a natural aversion to grace. A persistent turning away from grace is demonstrated biblically and historically. Even so, God has always preserved a remnant that fully embraces grace. The unconditional free grace of God that brings us to the cross of Christ for all and any merit before God keeps us humble, which allows us to experience more grace: "But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (James 4:6). The slave woman of legalism and her son will always persecute the free woman of grace and her son (Galatians 4:29). The two cannot co-exist or mix. Paul's advice is to throw out the slave woman and her son (Galatians 4:30). Watch carefully for the natural drift away from grace. Don't try to compromise with legalism or anything that threatens the absolute free nature of grace. Rather, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be

entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).

02.45. Can the Willful Sin of Hebrews 10:26 be forgiven?

GraceNotes - no. 45 by Dr. Charlie Bing Can the Willful Sin of Hebrews 10:26 be forgiven?

Hebrews 10:26-27 reads, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries." Some argue from this that willful or continual sin cannot be forgiven and salvation can be lost, or that those in view of judgment were never really saved to begin with. They would interpret the judgment as hell. Who is being warned? That those being warned are truly saved is very clear. Paul's use of "we" is more than rhetorical. He is warning readers who are Christians like himself (see "Interpreting Hebrews: Beginning with the Readers," GraceNotes no. 15) of something that is possible for Christians to do. The immediate context shows that this warning is for those who "have received the knowledge of the truth" (Hebrews 10:26), are sanctified (Hebrews 10:29), know God and are "His people" (Hebrews 10:30), "were illuminated" and suffered for their faith (Hebrews 10:32), and have "an enduring possession" in heaven (Hebrews 10:34).

What is the willful sin?

Since the Bible uniformly teaches that a person once saved cannot lose his or her salvation (see "Eternally Secure," GraceNotes no. 24), the loss of salvation cannot be in view here. Besides, most sins are intentional or willful to some degree. However, the Bible recognizes some sins that are unintentional (Numbers 15:22-29). Perhaps neglecting to pray for someone would be an example of an unintentional sin. But in most cases the perpetrator knows that he or she is committing a sin.

Some interpret the willful sin as continual sin (NIV: "If we deliberately keep on sinning"), but this is reading too much into the present participle used for "to sin." The author of Hebrews apparently has a particular sin in mind, which becomes evident as we consult the context. He had exhorted his readers previously to hold fast to their confession (Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 4:14) and has warned them about the dangers of not pressing on in their faith (Hebrews 6:1-8; see "How Do We Explain Hebrews 6:4-8?" GraceNotes no. 39). He reinforces this concern in the verses just before this warning about the willful sin (Hebrews 10:23-25). The readers were on the verge of abandoning their confession of faith in Christ and returning to the Mosaic Law and its sacrifices, which is why he discussed the inadequacy of the Mosaic sacrifices especially from Hebrews 8:1-13 onward. The willful sin would be a deliberate abandonment of their confession of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for a return to insufficient Jewish sacrifices. The author had written them that "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9:28), that "by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:14), and that once forgiven "there is no longer an offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:18). The Law offered them nothing since it looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:1-10). Should they turn back to the Law, Christ's perfect and eternal sacrifice would be sufficient to cover even that great and willful sin soteriologically, but they would still face a severe non-soteriological judgment. The

author had just referred to an approaching "Day" (Hebrews 10:25) implying that there will be an accounting, which we know as the Judgment Seat of Christ taught in so many other places in the New Testament (e.g., Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The background for understanding this passage is very likely Numbers 15:30-31. There we see that for certain serious (or presumptuous) sins no sacrifices were stipulated, therefore those who committed those sins were "cut off" from their people (put to death). The author is saying that if the readers of Hebrews abandon the only sufficient sacrifice for their sins, they too will be judged severely.

What is the judgment for the willful sin?

Because the author uses strong language ("fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation") and speaks of a punishment worse than death (Numbers 15:30), many conclude he is threatening them with eternal hell fire. But because they are Christians who cannot lose their salvation and because he has in view the Judgment Seat of Christ, this cannot be. The exact judgment is not specified, only its severity. It is hard to imagine a judgment worse than death, but human experience does testify that there are occasions when death is more enticing than severe suffering (Just ask Jonah! Jonah 4:3). The author is comparing this judgment to the death penalty for the presumptuous sin of Numbers 15:30-31, which was the severest penalty dictated at that time. But in light of New Testament revelation about the Judgment Seat of Christ, we know that a more severe judgment would be a negative assessment there because of the eternal implications. The possibility of a negative assessment at the Judgment Seat of Christ is a "fearful expectation of judgment" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:9-11) for those who have not done good. The "fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (literally "fiery zeal") refers to the zeal of God's judgment toward sin. Believers can experience the same zeal of judgment toward their sin as God's enemies experience toward theirs, though the results are different. In the end, these readers who would be judged are still "His people" (Numbers 15:30; a quote from Deuteronomy 32:35-36). They will not fall into hell, but "into the hands of the living God" (Numbers 15:31). Though at first glance fire may conjure up thoughts of hell, fire was actually used often in the Old Testament to judge or threaten judgment on God's own people (see "Hebrews on Fire," GraceNotes no. 34).

Conclusion

Jesus Christ died for all sins, even willful sins, but if the readers of Hebrews turn back to Mosaic sacrifices, they will not find there any greater provision for forgiveness and they will face a severe judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ. There is no other refuge from sin's penalty than the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. This should be a warning to us also to look only to Jesus Christ for forgiveness because of His fully efficacious death and resurrection. "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

02.46. Can an Unregenerate Person Believe the Gospel?

GraceNotes - no. 46 by Dr. Charlie Bing Can an Unregenerate Person Believe the Gospel?

Many would answer this question, "Of course. How else could a person be eternally saved?" But there are some who would disagree, because they think that a person must be regenerated (born again) before he or she can believe the gospel. That perspective is demanded by their view of man's sinfulness, which they call total depravity. But what does the Bible say? The issue of total depravity

Total depravity is a theological term used by some to describe the sinfulness of man. The term itself is not in the Bible. After Adam's fall in Genesis 3:1-24, man is considered "dead in trespasses and sins" as described in Ephesians 2:1 (see also Romans 3:10-18; Romans 5:12, 1 Corinthians 15:22). How one understands this spiritual death determines how one relates faith to regeneration.

Those who insist that God must regenerate a person before that person can believe define total depravity as man's total inability to respond positively to God. They believe that an unregenerate person cannot even understand and believe the gospel. This view is held by Reformed theology and strong versions of Calvinism.

It would be more biblical to take "dead in trespasses and sins" as a description of man's condition before God. Because of Adam's sin and man's relationship to Adam, man is totally separated from God and lacks anything that can commend him to God. Though sin's corruption extends to every man and all of his being, man retains the capacity to respond to God's initiative. Even after Adam sinned and died spiritually, he was able to talk with God immediately (Genesis 2:17; Genesis 3:1-19). The biblical evidence that regeneration does not precede faith Many biblical arguments show that man's sinfulness does not require regeneration before faith.

Man remains in God's image. Man was made in God's image, which includes a measure of self-determination. The image of God was not destroyed by man's fall, but marred or corrupted, with the result that man, when left to himself, is inclined toward evil and rejection of God. Self-determination, even if used to reject God, is essential to humanness and personhood. Without self-determination man would be nothing more than a robot with every decision and action determined and controlled by God.

Man is responsible. Because human beings can make self-determining choices, unbelievers are held accountable by God for rejecting the gospel (John 3:18, John 3:36, John 5:40-47, Acts 17:30, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). God would not be just or fair if He condemned people who could not believe because He did not regenerate them. That would actually make God the author of evil. The invitation to believe is legitimate. God's invitation to be saved through the gospel is a sincere and legitimate offer only if any and every person can believe it. If God must regenerate people before they can believe the gospel, then the invitation is not really to all people, but only to those already born again. But this is contrary to biblical statements that the gospel is for all (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; 1 John 2:2). Just as Paul preached everywhere with the

assumption that anyone could respond to the gospel (Acts 20:21), we also should share the gospel with everyone (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8) because it is a genuine offer to everyone. God regenerates anyone who believes the gospel.

God draws men to Himself. Because in his sinful state man does not seek God. The Bible teaches that before anyone believes, God draws that person to Himself (John 6:44; John 12:32). God convinces or persuades the unbeliever of truth, righteousness, and judgment concerning Jesus Christ (John 16:8-11). The Holy Spirit works mysteriously in a person's heart to bring her to the point of faith (John 3:8).

Faith is the means not the result. Nowhere does the Bible say that faith is created by regeneration. John 3:16 is a very familiar verse which, according to the preceding context of John 3:1-15, explains how God gives eternal life as a result of faith, not a requirement for faith. Likewise, Ephesians 2:8 explains how it is through faith God made alive those who were dead in sins (Ephesians 2:1-7). Regeneration is the result of receiving God's eternal life, and that life is only available through faith (John 5:24; John 20:31).

Faith is simply a personal response. Man can believe either truth or falsehood that is presented to him. An unregenerate person can believe the truth of the law of gravity, or he can believe the error of a flat earth. Likewise, an unregenerate person can believe the truth of Christ's gospel or she can believe the error of a false religion. Since faith is only the instrument, the response of faith in the gospel is not a special kind of faith. Faith is simply faith. It is the object of faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is special and brings salvation.

Faith is not a good work. Those who define total depravity as total inability claim that if man were able to believe, then that faith would be a meritorious good work for salvation. But that cannot be true, because the Bible declares that faith is necessarily contrary to works (Romans 3:27; Romans 4:4-6, Romans 11:6, Ephesians 2:8-9). Faith is not the cause of our salvation; God is the cause. Faith is God's designated means by which the unregenerate can receive His grace for salvation. Faith is passive because it means that one is convinced that something is true or trustworthy. It is not a work in the sense of actively doing something, thus it is non-meritorious.

Conclusion The view that regeneration must precede faith is a theological construct, not a biblical one. To say that a person goes from being spiritually dead to eternally alive before he believes in Jesus Christ is both absurd and contrary to biblical teaching. The Bible teaches that man is so corrupted by sin that left to himself, he would not seek God or believe the gospel. Therefore, God must draw a person to the point of faith. Nevertheless, it is the person who believes. Faith is not man's contribution or good work. It is the means through which man receives God's grace in salvation. The unregenerate person believes in Jesus Christ as Savior precisely because he can contribute nothing to God's work of salvation. Faith makes the new birth accessible to anyone, but that birth is God's work.

02.47. Demon Faith and the Misuse of James 2:19

GraceNotes - no. 47 by Dr. Charlie Bing Demon Faith and the Misuse of James 2:19

James 2:19 reads, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!" Some Christians use this verse to argue that the faith that saves must be proved by works or it is not genuine. The argument goes like this: "A person who says that he believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, but does not do good works is not really saved. He is like the demons who believe in God but are not saved because they have not submitted to God or obeyed Him." This is a careless misuse of the verse.

Some simple observations

It is surprising that James 2:19 is used so often when a few simple observations would disarm the argument that it proves the necessity of works for saving faith.

First, this verse is not about eternal salvation, because demons cannot be saved. Their fate and condemnation is sealed (Matthew 8:29; Matthew 25:41, Jude 1:6). That is why they tremble when they think of God.

Second, the object of the demons' faith is the fact that there is one God, that is, monotheism. No one is saved by belief in monotheism anyway, so this verse is not used soteriologically. Many of the world's non-Christian religions are monotheistic.

Third, it does not say that the demons believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Jesus Christ did not die and rise from death to save demons but humans. While Christ's work saves humans, it destroys the devil (Hebrews 2:14).

Fourth, a quick survey of commentaries shows the difficulty of properly interpreting this verse in the context of James 2:16-20. At question is when James' words end and the objector's words begin and end. If, as some argue, James 2:19 is spoken by an objector to James, should it be used to prove a crucial theological point? Also, if it is from such a difficult passage to interpret, should it be used as a primary text to prove or disprove anyone's salvation? Much clearer passages dismiss works as necessary for obtaining eternal salvation (eg., Romans 4:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-5). The simple context The book of James is written to Jewish Christians (see GraceNotes No. 2) to encourage them to become mature by responding to trials in faith (James 1:2-4). The section of James 2:14-26 is also addressing the Christian readers as "my brethren." James is arguing that a Christian who only declares his faith but does no good is of no help to those in need (James 2:14-16) and his or her faith is therefore "dead" or useless (James 2:17, James 2:20). A workless faith is also worthless in saving a Christian from a merciless judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ, a judgment for Christians where they will be held accountable for how they lived (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). This judgment for Christians is mentioned at both ends of this section, in James 2:13 and James 3:1, showing it governs James' thinking about the relationship of works to faith. A simple fact about faith

James 2:19 does show that faith is faith. There are not different kinds of faith, but different objects of faith. It is not the kind of faith or the reality of faith that is being questioned, it is the object of faith and the usefulness of one's faith. The reality of the demons' faith is not questioned, but they only believe that there is one God. They truly believe that, and that is why they tremble in fear of their judgment.

Conclusion

James 2:19 should not be used to argue that works are needed to prove saving faith. This verse shows that demons have a real faith. They believe in one God and know that God has sealed their fate in judgment, therefore they tremble. But they do not and cannot believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. While good works are God's purpose for us, are useful to others, and give us a good evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ, they cannot prove or disprove the reality of saving faith. Eternal salvation is by grace alone through faith alone - apart from any works at any time.

02.48. For Whom Did Christ Die?

GraceNotes - no. 48 by Dr. Charlie Bing For Whom Did Christ Die? Can we truthfully say to anyone "Jesus Christ died for your sins"? While many Christians say we can, there are some who disagree.

Those who disagree argue that Jesus Christ did not die for everyone, but only for those who are the elect or chosen by God. Jesus did not die for the non-elect (the unsaved) because God did not will to save them. They claim that if Christ died for all people it would make a mockery of the death of His Son (as ineffectual) and the non-elect because they are unable to respond to an offer of salvation. This view is known as limited atonement or particular atonement because it teaches that Christ's sacrificial death was limited in its provision. The opposing view, unlimited atonement or universal atonement, says that Christ died for all people in the world. A deeper look into limited atonement reveals many problems with that view.

Some theological problems The theological system of Five-point Calvinism teaches that human beings are totally dead to God in the sense that they cannot respond positively to Him at all. That erroneous view of man's sinfulness is the first step toward a view of limited atonement. This theology argues that since man cannot respond positively at all, God's saving grace must be totally unconditional such that man cannot be responsible even to believe. Man is saved because God sovereignly decrees it. Since not everyone is saved, God does not want everyone to be saved, therefore Jesus did not die for everyone. Furthermore, God must first regenerate a person and then give that person faith to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. The problem with this line of reasoning is that it starts with an unbiblical view of man's depravity. Man is capable of responding positively to God through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. (For a more complete discussion, see GraceNotes no. 46).

Another problem with limited atonement is that the Bible teaches Jesus Christ is the counterpart to the first Adam (Romans 5:14-19; 1 Corinthians 15:45-47). Christ remedies Adam's sin and its consequences of death and condemnation for the whole world (not some of the world). As the last Adam, Christ provides freedom from sin, life, and righteousness to any and all who believe. The Bible clearly says that God loves everyone and desires all people to be saved (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). He paid the price for the sin of all mankind so that all can be saved - if they believe. Jesus did not die just for all sinners, He died to pay the penalty for all sin which is the problem of all mankind (Isaiah 53:10-12; John 1:29).

If limited atonement is true, God's character is impugned. Someone condemned to eternal hell for not believing in Christ could object, "But it's not my fault; God didn't choose me!"

Some biblical problems A number of Bible passages show clearly that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world and wants everyone to be saved. Some selected passages are summarized with their pertinent truth:

John 1:29 – The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world.

John 3:16-17 – God loves the world and gave His Son to save the world.

2 Corinthians 5:19 – God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself.

1 Timothy 2:3-6 – Because God our Savior desires all men to be saved, Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all.

1 Timothy 4:10 – God is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

Hebrews 2:9 – Jesus tasted death for everyone.

2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

1 John 2:2 – Jesus is the propitiation not just for the Christian's sins, but for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 4:14 – The Father sent the Son as Savior of the world.

Those who believe in limited atonement try to argue that in these passages "world" means "the elect" and "all" means "all the elect," but that is not what the text says so it is imported artificially by their theological system. The word "world" is used 80 times in John, but it never means "the elect." They want to argue that Christ did not die for all people (without exception, everyone), but for all kinds of people (without distinction between races, sexes, etc.). But the meaning of "all" is "all." The Bible couldn't be clearer. Jesus' death was for all; He died for Christians, some of whom may dishonor Him, and even non-Christians who reject Him. Consider these passages summarized:

Hebrews 10:29 – Some who are sanctified trample the Son of God underfoot, count the blood of the covenant a common thing, and insult the Spirit of grace.

2 Peter 2:1 – The Lord bought false teachers who deny Him and who will be destroyed.

Some practical problems

If limited atonement is true, then we cannot truthfully say to everyone "God loves you and Jesus died for you." We cannot tell everyone that God offers them eternal life. We cannot tell them to believe, because if they are not elect they could not. We cannot legitimately offer the gospel to "every creature" (Mark 16:15). Of course, if we hold to limited atonement we cannot know who the unsaved elect are, so evangelism is quagmired in confusion and contradiction.

Conclusion

Limited atonement comes from an erroneous understanding of total depravity and unconditional election. When allowed to speak for itself, the Bible does not support limited atonement, but affirms an unlimited atonement. It is not a mockery of Christ's work on the cross or of the unsaved for God to love them and pay for their sin. The validity and value of God's love and gracious offer of eternal life is not determined by the potential recipient but by the Giver and His motive. It is the highest love for God to give His Son to pay for the sin of those who would reject Him. We can boldly tell people that God loves them, Jesus Christ paid the price for their sin, rose from the dead, and offers them eternal life if they believe His promise. Jesus' atonement was sufficient and available to all people, but is only realized by those who believe. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first

and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

02.49. Perseverance Versus Preservation

GraceNotes - no. 49 by Dr. Charlie Bing Perseverance Versus Preservation The concept of The Perseverance of the Saints has been a part of various Christian theological systems from early Christianity. Simply stated, this teaching says that a true Christian will persevere in faith and good works to the end of life and so proves he or she is eternally saved. If a professed Christian does not persevere to the end of life, it proves that person was not a true Christian after all.

While perseverance emphasizes the Christian enduring through God's power, preservation emphasizes the Christian secured by God's promise. Preservation means that when God promises eternal life to believers in Jesus Christ, He will keep them secure with no possibility of ever losing their salvation.

Preservation of believers, not perseverance of the saints, is the view taught by God's Word and is consistent with the gospel of salvation by grace. The argument for perseverance

Perseverance is taught by differing theological systems. The Reformed Calvinist position (It is the P in their TULIP) argues that since man is totally unable to respond, individuals must be unconditionally elected and they alone receive the benefits of Christ's atonement through God's irresistible grace. The faith that must be given to man as divine enablement to believe also becomes the power to keep one in the faith to the end of life. At the other end of the theological spectrum, the Arminian system argues that a person is saved only as long as he perseveres. In both systems, works are necessary to prove and validate one's salvation. Without enduring good works, no one is finally saved. In both systems, assurance is temporary, that is, one can be sure of salvation only as long as he perseveres. Many in both systems admit that absolute assurance is impossible because no one can predict the future. The arguments against perseverance

Perseverance depends on faith as a special power given to man, but the Scripture does not accommodate this thought at all. Faith is our response to God's promise of eternal life. In Ephesians 2:8, the gift is not faith but salvation by grace (See GraceNotes No. 48). In spite of Ephesians 2:9 that says we are saved "not by works," perseverance makes works a necessary proof, and thus a condition of salvation. This is inconsistent with being saved by grace. Romans 4:4-5 makes the contrast clearly, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (See also Romans 11:6; Titus 3:5). There is only one condition for salvation by grace, and that is to believe (Romans 3:22). When a person believes, he is convinced of God's promise to give eternal life, to justify, or redeem (There are a number of terms used for eternal salvation). Assurance can be absolute because God's promise is absolute: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (John 5:24). Romans 4:16 makes it clear that our assurance of receiving God's promise has to be through faith in God's grace (not our performance). Abraham was credited with righteousness because he was "fully convinced that what [God] had promised, He was also able to perform" (Romans 4:21).

If eternal salvation was dependent on our performance enduring to the end of life, then no one could be sure about salvation until life has ended. Yet the Bible has clear indications of genuine believers who did not endure in faith and works to the end of their lives (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 1 John 5:16). In 2 Timothy 2:12-13 it is implied that it is possible for believers not to endure: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." Endurance is rewarded with reigning, but denial of the Lord is met with denial of that reward. Even if we are faithless (from Greek *apisteo*, literally, "be without faith" or "disbelieve") God will be faithful to His promise of making us alive with Him (2 Timothy 2:11). The preferred term, preservation

Preservation is a term that speaks of our security of salvation. Unlike perseverance that emphasizes our performance, preservation emphasizes God's promise to give us eternal life (John 3:16), God's purpose to see us conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29), and God's power to let nothing separate us from His love (Romans 8:31-39). If God preserves us in our salvation, we can be absolutely sure we are saved forever, something that is impossible in perseverance.

Preservation does not negate the true biblical concept of perseverance, which understands that perseverance is not for salvation but for rewards, as seen above in 2 Timothy 2:11-13. In 1 Corinthians 9:27 Paul was expressing the possibility of losing not his salvation, but his reward, when he wrote: "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (from Greek *adokimos*, which never refers to hell or loss of salvation in the New Testament). A major theme of Hebrews is the importance of the Christian to endure, or persevere (Hebrews 6:11-12; Hebrews 10:36; Hebrews 12:1). The practical applications When we separate perseverance from salvation by grace through faith, the New Testament has many rich applications for Christians:

We are exhorted to persevere in faithful living and service (1 Timothy 6:11; Hebrews 10:36; Hebrews 12:1, 2 Peter 1:6).

We are rewarded for persevering not with salvation, but with temporal and eternal blessings (Romans 5:3-4; Colossians 1:21-23; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 11:1-40; James 1:12; James 5:11; 2 Peter 1:8-11).

We can be absolutely sure of our salvation since it does not depend on our performance but on God who preserves us (Romans 8:28-39; 1 John 5:11-13).

We are motivated to serve God and remain faithful by His forgiving grace and His unconditional love (Romans 12:1; Titus 2:11-12).

We can counsel other believers on the basis of who they are (true Christians), not on the basis of whether they are saved or not.

Conclusion

Preservation, not perseverance, is the promise of the gospel. If this is misunderstood, the gospel of grace is nullified. Salvation is not based on our persevering performance, but on God's preserving promise, purpose, and power.

02.50. Sanctification: Whose Work Is It?

GraceNotes - no. 50 by Dr. Charlie Bing Sanctification: Whose Work Is It? The Bible commonly uses the term sanctify (The same Greek word is behind the words sanctification, saint, holy) to mean set apart from sin to God, to be holy. A Christian's sanctification has three aspects: past (positional justification), present (progressive sanctification), and future (perfect glorification). We know that justification and glorification are by God's grace through faith, not our effort or works. Can we say the same about our present experience of sanctification?

Sanctification is by grace.

Sanctification (we will use the word to mean present progressive sanctification) is by grace because the God who justified us also provides everything we need on the way to our final glorification (Romans 8:29-32). The three persons of the Godhead all play an active role in our sanctification: The Father (John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:23), the Son (Ephesians 5:26; 1 John 1:7); and the Spirit (Romans 15:16; 2 Corinthians 3:18). God also uses various means for our sanctification such as His Word, His Spirit, the church, trials, and various other experiences. The power of His Holy Spirit that gives us new birth at justification is the same power that sanctifies us through the life of the risen Christ.

Sanctification involves our cooperative response to God's grace.

Since God supplies the power, sanctification is by grace, but it is not automatic. If it were, it would seem that all Christians would grow at the same rate and none could be held accountable for stagnation or lack of growth. But we know that all Christians do not grow at the same rate or progress to the same degree of holiness. We also know that the Judgment Seat of Christ holds Christians accountable for how they use their lives (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10), which indicates different degrees of progress in sanctification. That is why many Bible passages put the onus on the Christian to grow spiritually (eg. Romans 12:1-2; 2 Peter 3:18). However, the Bible clearly indicates that the Christian must cooperate with God.

1 Corinthians 15:10. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Php 2:12-13. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Colossians 1:29. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

2 Peter 1:3-4 with 2 Peter 1:5-6. ...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises ...But also for this very reason, giving

all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control... An illustration may help understand the cooperation required. For a baby girl to grow, parents must feed her. But it is also true that for a baby girl to grow, she must eat. Both of these statements are true, because a baby's growth is a cooperative effort.

Sanctification is facilitated through faith.

God's grace in sanctification is available in the form of every resource we need to grow in Christ. But like eternal salvation, these gracious resources must be accessed through faith.

Romans 5:1-2. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand ...

Galatians 2:20. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Faith claims and appropriates the power and promises of God that bring spiritual growth.

Conclusion

Every Christian is sanctified by grace from the moment of justification, through present sanctification, to the final state of glorification. But the progress of our present sanctification may vary depending on our faith that accesses the grace God has made available to us in Christ. Sanctification is God's desire for us (1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:14-15), but it is not an automatic act of God, nor is it merely from human effort. Christians are sanctified by God's grace accessed through faith.

02.51. Fruits and False Prophets - Matthew 7:15-20

GraceNotes - no. 51 by Dr. Charlie Bing Fruits and False Prophets - Matthew 7:15-20

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them." - Matthew 7:15-20
This passage is often used to argue that a person's works will be proof of his or her salvation. It assumes that "fruits" refers to visible conduct that can be quantified in such a way that others can pass judgment on that person's salvation ("you will know them"). According to this interpretation, bad behavior proves a person is not saved; good behavior proves a person is saved. Is that what this passage teaches? The Subject of the Passage

It should be noted first that Jesus is not addressing believers or professing believers in general, but false prophets and how to recognize them. To be exact, the test is not for judging the reality of another's salvation, but for judging whether a prophet is from God or not. The Focus of the Passage

Context clarifies the focus of the passage. These statements are from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus Christ is explaining the highest standards of righteousness that characterize the kingdom. It is a righteousness that exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). The Scribes and Pharisees were highly scrupulous in their behavior, so it seems unlikely that Jesus' reference to "fruits" would focus on conduct. Likewise, the following passage in Matthew 7:21-23 mentions those who do great things in Jesus' name, but Jesus ignores the significance of those professors' works. The prophets first appear deceptively as true believers ("in sheep's clothing"). They are indiscernible from believers in what can be seen. They are evidently clothed in a façade of Christian behavior which proves to be an inadequate basis of judgment. It is only what is unseen that later proves them false prophets. The Test of the Prophets The test that Jesus gives is not for the existence of fruit, but for the quality of fruit (Matthew 7:17). The false prophet may have fruits, but given time to ripen, they prove "bad" (Matthew 7:16). Likewise, a tree cannot be judged good or bad from its outer appearance, but from the fruit it produces (Matthew 7:17-18). The true test of a prophet is whether his fruits are good or bad. But what does "fruits" refer to?

If "fruits" refers only to works, this creates a couple problems. First, many false religions produce teachers and adherents with good moral conduct and good works. Second, there would be a conflict with the following Matthew 7:21-23, where the professors have good works, but the Lord says He never knew them.

"Fruits" must certainly refer to more than works; words must be in view. In Matthew 12:33-37 there is a similar discussion about fruits that shows they are one's words:

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." This is how a person proves his true nature. Given time, what is beneath the deceptive façade is exposed in his words. Words express one's beliefs, thus they are the basis for vindication or condemnation. The Mosaic Law also prescribed the test of a false prophet. In Deuteronomy 13:1-3 the Israelites are told to ignore any miraculous works of a so-called prophet and judge him only by his words. Likewise, in Deuteronomy 18:18-22 the validity of a prophet of God ultimately depends on his words, whether they are true or false, fulfilled or not.

Conclusion

Words of a teacher or any person will eventually betray his or her beliefs. Outward conduct can be deceiving and is not a reliable judge of the reality of one's faith. A person can only be judged by what he or she says when compared to the truth of the Bible. The Word of God is the final judge of a teacher's credibility or a person's salvation. Don't be fooled by someone's works; they are not a reliable basis for judging (See GraceNotes no. 28, "Can Good Works Prove Salvation?"). If we are saved by grace through faith, then one's verbal testimony should affirm that truth according to God's Word. We would hope that one's conduct is consistent with that profession.

02.52. Lordship and False Followers - Matthew 7:21-23

GraceNotes - no. 52 by Dr. Charlie Bing Lordship and False Followers - Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' - Matthew 7:21-23 This passage is often cited to show that many professing Christians are not actually saved. It is clear that these false followers are rejected by Jesus Christ even though they know who He is and have abundant good works. But does this passage teach, as some claim, that a person must be totally surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in order to be saved? What is doing "the will of My Father in heaven" that gains entry into heaven?

What we know about these followers Here's what we know about the subjects of the passage:

They are evidently related to the false prophets of Matthew 7:15-20 (see GraceNotes no. 51, Fruits and False Prophets – Matthew 7:15-20) who would lead people away from Jesus as the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14). The "Not everyone who says" in Matthew 7:21 links to the "them" in Matthew 7:20, as does the "you" of Matthew 7:23. Jesus could also be speaking of those deceived by the false prophets. Outwardly this group displays good works (they look like sheep; Matthew 7:15), but their true beliefs are revealed ultimately in what they say.

They have a correct theology in that they confess that Jesus is Lord. The title "Lord" is a title of respect, but also of deity when used of Jesus Christ. Its repetition here indicates an emphasis on who Christ is.

They are submitted to Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives. By their emphatic address ("Lord, Lord") and boast of miracles done in His name (Matthew 7:22), we could even say that these professors are ultra-lordship. There is no indication they err in their concept of who Christ is, nor is there any indication that they are not totally submitted to him in their ethical conduct. Indeed, they are very enthusiastic about following and serving Jesus Christ.

They have many good works - actually, great works. They have preached and spoken as prophets, performed exorcisms, and done many supernatural signs.

They are trusting in their works to merit eternal life. Their plea to Christ reveals an attempt to justify their entrance into the kingdom of heaven based on their magnificent performances. Their pride in their deeds reveals an attitude of self-righteousness. In their plea, they do not say, "Have we not believed in You alone?"

They are "many" in number (Matthew 7:22), not rare exceptions. Sadly, the nature of this self-deception is widespread. This is not surprising, since Jesus previously indicated that most people would miss the way to eternal life (Matthew 7:13-14).

They have never been eternally saved. They did not have salvation and lose it, or believe in Christ and fail to persevere. Jesus said He never knew them and rejects them (Matthew 7:23).

They are practicing lawlessness (Matthew 7:23). But what does this mean? There is no hint of conduct contrary to the Mosaic Law or of blatant immorality. The meaning of "lawlessness" must be connected to doing "the will of the Father" that Jesus mentions in Matthew 7:21. They are not doing God's will in relation to Jesus Christ, because they are misinterpreting the law as the Scribes and Pharisees did (Romans 5:21, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-6), using it to establish their own righteousness instead of looking to the exceeding righteousness of Christ (Romans 5:20).

What we know about the Father's will

God's will for unsaved people is not merely proper theology and impressive works. In the context, Jesus wants people to accept God's Way (Matthew 7:13-14) and God's Word (Matthew 7:24-27), and obey accordingly. Previously in this Sermon, Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven was entered only by those whose righteousness exceeds that of the self-righteous Jewish leaders (Matthew 5:20-48). The righteousness required for eternal life is not based on outward conduct (Matthew 5:21-28), which is why they should seek God's righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Jesus is the narrow gate that leads to God's righteousness and life (Matthew 7:13-14; John 10:9). Similar words and concepts in Matthew 7:21-23 and Matthew 21:23-46 show that the issue is belief in Christ and His righteousness (Matthew 21:25, Matthew 21:32). Other Bible passages help us know how to receive God's righteousness (Romans 3:21-24). Works are not acceptable for obtaining God's righteousness (Romans 4:4-5). The only thing God wants an unbeliever to do is believe in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 6:27-29). The will of the Father is to believe in Jesus Christ for righteousness (Matthew 12:50; John 6:40).

What we learn from this example

Good theology is not enough to save a person. In Mark 1:24 demons also knew and proclaimed a proper view of Christ's position as Lord.

Submission to Christ's lordship is not enough to save a person. Someone can surrender all of his or her life and be a devoted follower and servant of Christ's ethical commands, but not know Jesus Christ as Savior. After all, the people in this passage do not cry "Savior, Savior."

Good works, no matter how great they are, are not enough to save a person. Neither can one's deeds prove a relationship to Jesus Christ as Savior. Miraculous performances can come from sources other than God (Acts 19:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:1-12).

Self-righteousness cannot save a person. Those in the passage are not claiming to have believed in Christ for His righteousness. Unsaved people need a righteousness outside of themselves and their own good works, which can never meet God's perfect standard. Only Christ's righteousness obtained through faith in Jesus Christ satisfies God's righteous requirements.

Many people who think they are Christians may not be saved. They are trusting in proper Christian theology, dedicated service to Jesus Christ, or performance of great deeds. They have missed God's will, which is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior from sin and receive His righteousness rather than try to establish self-righteousness.

Those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior reveal an utter disrespect and contempt for God's command and desire for them to believe. Jesus rejects such people because this unbelief is the greatest form of disobedience (John 3:36), or lawlessness.

Conclusion This passage shows that there can be unsaved professing Christians who follow Jesus Christ outwardly, but do not know Him personally. This passage cannot be used to say that those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior are not saved unless they also submit to His lordship. That is exactly what the passage is not saying. There is no indication that this group has believed in Jesus as their Savior from sin, yet there is every indication that they have believed and submitted to Him as Lord of their lives. The reason they are not saved is that they have not done the Father's will - believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin who imputes His righteousness. Many professors of Christianity have a false security because they are looking at and trusting in their submission and their works instead of resting fully in the merit of Christ and His work on their behalf. Sadly, on the final Day of reckoning, they will find they do not have eternal life and have misled others to the same fate. We should surrender to Jesus Christ as our Lord, but we must believe in Him as our Savior if we are to have eternal life.

02.53. Doubtful Self-examination in 2 Corinthians 13:5

GraceNotes - no. 53 by Dr. Charlie Bing Doubtful Self-examination in 2 Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified. - 2 Corinthians 13:5

It is not uncommon to see this verse used to encourage professing Christians to examine themselves to see if they are genuinely saved. Though it is legitimate to encourage people to examine the veracity of the gospel they have believed in, after they have believed in the gospel, self-examination can become a discouraging exercise in futility. When the gospel of Jesus Christ ceases to be the focus of faith, believers can become lost in subjectivity and lose the assurance of their salvation, which undermines spiritual growth and maturity. The Focus of the Examination The Corinthians are told to examine themselves to see whether they are "in the faith," and to know whether Jesus Christ is in them. Nothing is mentioned about examining their works or their faith; that is foreign to the context. If works were to be examined, the Corinthians would fail miserably (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 1 Corinthians 6:1-20, 1 Corinthians 11:21-30). Neither are they told to examine their faith, but to see if they are "in the faith."

One interpretation tries to answer the problems caused by self-examination for salvation by viewing these as tests of the Corinthians' walk with the Lord and not tests of their regeneration. In this view "in the faith" and "Jesus Christ . . . in you" refers to the quality of the Corinthians' relationship with Christ. However, it seems best to take "in the faith" as an objective reference to being in the Christian body of beliefs (see for example, Titus 1:13). Likewise, Jesus Christ in them would be another objective indication of their genuine salvation (1 John 5:11-13). Though this might seem to agree with the first view about Paul questioning their saved state, the difference is significant. Paul is not asking them to examine themselves because he doubts their salvation, but because he is sure of it. That becomes the basis of his argument for his own authenticity, something which the Corinthians were scrutinizing. The Focus of Faith The Apostle Paul does not question the Corinthians' eternal salvation. Quite the contrary, he affirms it many times in this epistle (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 2 Corinthians 3:2-3, 2 Corinthians 6:14, 2 Corinthians 8:9; and here in the context, 2 Corinthians 13:11-14). For him to cast doubts on their salvation or encourage them to question their salvation is against the tenor of both his first and second epistles to them.

Self-examination, by definition, diverts one's attention away from the legitimate object of faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ (His person, His provision, His promise), to a subjective self-evaluation. The assurance that comes from faith alone in Christ alone becomes impossible because of the subjective nature of evaluating our walk, our works, or our faith. Fortunately, there is a better way to understand this passage.

Context is Key As usual, the context reveals the clues for the clearest interpretation. Paul is writing to the believers in the Corinthian church. They have many problems, some of which seem to be the result of false apostles undermining Paul's ministry. To exalt themselves, the false apostles

are claiming that Paul is a false apostle (2 Corinthians 10:2). One of Paul's purposes for writing is to defend and humbly reassert his apostleship (2 Corinthians 5:12-13, 2 Corinthians 10:1-18, 2 Corinthians 11:1-33, 2 Corinthians 12:11-33). The Corinthian Christians are confused and want "proof" (from dokimén, passing a test, being approved) that Christ is speaking through Paul (2 Corinthians 13:3). Paul tells them his power is from Christ, as they will see when he visits (2 Corinthians 13:1-4, 2 Corinthians 13:6). The false teachers seek to "disqualify" (from adokimos, not passing a test, unqualified, disapproved) Paul as one who does not pass the test of an authentic apostle. But when Paul arrives, the Corinthians will see that he is not disapproved by God. The Corinthians themselves are his credentials of authenticity (2 Corinthians 3:1-3). Christ is in him because Christ is in them! Because they are surely saved, the Corinthians should know that Paul is not disqualified (2 Corinthians 13:6).

Thus Paul proves his authenticity by pointing the Corinthians to their own salvation experience. In the original language, "yourselves" is emphatic in the sentence throwing them back to 2 Corinthians 13:3 where Paul says, "since you seek proof of Christ speaking in me . . ." They should not examine Paul for Christ's presence, but themselves! Of course Christ is speaking through Paul, because Paul preached Christ to them and they were saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-2; 2 Corinthians 1:19), so Paul must be authentic. His argument here is the same as in 2 Corinthians 10:7 - "If you are Christ's, then we are Christ's." Only if they fail the test, would he.

One key to interpreting this passage is to note Paul's use of rhetoric and irony. In 2 Corinthians Paul uses highly emotional rhetorical language for emphasis (note especially the irony in 2 Corinthians 10:1-18, 2 Corinthians 11:1-33, 2 Corinthians 12:1-21). The way the question is asked in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?" expects a positive answer - "Of course you know that Christ is in you!" The wording of the original language in the phrase after that, "unless indeed you are disqualified," uses irony to mean the opposite - obviously they know they are not disqualified from eternal salvation. 2 Corinthians 13:6 then follows with more irony - The readers were questioning Paul, but after looking at their own salvation they should know he has passed the test of authenticity too.

Conclusion For Paul to cast doubt on the Corinthians' salvation would be contrary to his affirmations and declarations of their saved status which are ubiquitous in his epistles to them. Paul is motivating his readers to grow in their Christian experience not by having them question and seek their salvation again, but by recognizing and submitting to his apostolic authority and the truth he teaches (2 Corinthians 13:7-10). After twelve chapters of assuming and affirming their salvation, why would he now question it and undermine his whole appeal? This passage should never be used to make those who have believed the gospel doubt their salvation by self-examination. On the contrary, this passage should teach us that the best way to motivate Christians toward truth and maturity is not by making them doubt their salvation, but by affirming it. The fact that we are saved by God's grace, belong to Christ, and have Him within us, is the best basis to appeal for godly attitudes and conduct.

02.54. The Fate of Fruitless Followers in John 15:6

GraceNotes - no. 54 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Fate of Fruitless Followers in John 15:6

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. - John 15:6

What do the branches represent in John 15:6 and what is their fate? One popular interpretation says the branches are superficial followers of Jesus Christ who never go on to do good works. These unsaved individuals are burned in hell. This interpretation makes fruit a test of true faith and an indicator of who is truly a Christian. Another interpretation sees this passage relating to true believers and hell is not in view. The argument for superficial followers

Those who say this passage refers to unbelievers and their fate interpret the word "abide" as a synonym for "believe." They interpret the term "takes away" (airo) in John 15:2 as a removal to judgment in the fire of hell described in John 15:6. It is assumed in this interpretation that "fruit" refers to visible and measureable works. In summary, this view says that those who have only a superficial relationship with Jesus Christ and do not show fruit prove that they are not Christians and will perish in hell.

Making fruit (works in their understanding) a test of true faith is problematic since faith is simply the confidence or persuasion that something is true. According to the Bible there cannot be any infringement of works on faith itself (Romans 4:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-9), although faith should produce works (Ephesians 2:10). But that is different from saying that faith must produce works, and that those works will be visible or measureable. An examination of the passage and context yields a better interpretation.

Contextual observations

It is easily recognized that John 13:1-38, John 14:1-31, John 15:1-27, John 16:1-33, John 17:1-26 form a distinct unit in John. After His evangelistic presentation to the world in John 1:1-51, John 2:1-25, John 3:1-36, John 4:54, John 5:1-47, John 6:1-71, John 7:1-53, John 8:1-59, John 9:1-41, John 10:1-42, John 11:1-57, John 12:1-50, Jesus has an intimate conversation with His saved disciples (Unsaved Judas has departed; John 13:30). The commandment to love one another frames the discourse of John 13:31-38, John 14:1-31, John 15:1-17. Fruitfulness in the context seems related to the command to love. Clearly, the subject of John 15:1-10 is fruitfulness, not salvation or eternal condemnation. In light of His imminent absence, Jesus' purpose is to encourage the disciples to keep this commandment to love and thus bear the fruit that love engenders.

Jesus would not tell his disciples that they are in danger of losing their salvation or that they were never really saved. On the contrary, He implies that they are in Him as branches of the true vine (John 15:2). This speaks of their union and close relationship to Him. They are also "already clean," which speaks either of their justification (cf. Peter in John 13:8-11), or possibly their

sanctification experience (pruning, John 15:2) as they continue to sit under Jesus' Word (cf. John 17:17). Either way, it confirms that they are saved.

Lexical considerations

Abiding leads to fruit-bearing (John 15:4-5). Some take abide as a synonym for believe. But why would Jesus tell his saved disciples that they need to believe in Him? And if Jesus means believe, why doesn't He use the word believe as He does so many times in this Gospel in relation to salvation? That abide can't mean believe is clear by the statements that Jesus abides in the disciples (John 15:4-5) and that His words can abide in them (John 15:7). That it speaks of a deeper relationship for those already saved is indicated by the fact it is a condition for answered prayer in John 15:7 and is a result of obeying Christ's commandments in John 15:10. To abide means to continue or remain and refers to a close relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a term of intimate fellowship and is a condition of discipleship not salvation. In John 8:31 Jesus tells believers to abide in His Word in order to become true disciples. Abiding is a Christian responsibility. The fact that it is commanded allows the possibility that a believer may not comply (John 8:4-6).

Those who say John 15:6 speaks of the judgment fire of hell interpret "takes away" (from the Greek verb *airo*) in John 15:2 as a taking away to judgment. But *airo* is better translated "lifts up" (used similarly in John 5:8-12; John 8:59; John 10:18, John 11:41) describing the tender care of the Vinedresser who lifts the fruitless branches off the ground so they can absorb more sun, are less susceptible to damage, and thus become fruitful. This is more consistent with the practice of viticulture, the caretaking responsibility of the Vinedresser mentioned in John 15:1-3, and the desire for fruitfulness in John 15:2 and John 15:6. John 15:2 goes on to say that once fruit arrives, the branch is pruned to produce more fruit. God's responsibility is to care for His people in a way that encourages fruitfulness (John 15:1-3), but the Christian's responsibility is to cooperate by abiding (John 15:4-8).

Interpretational assumptions

Too often when fire is mentioned in the Bible, the reader assumes it speaks of hell fire. But fire is used more often literally of temporal judgment or figuratively of God's discipline, anger, zeal, or jealousy (see GraceNotes no. 34, "Hebrews on Fire"). Fire is also used of God's future revealing judgment of a Christian's life at the Judgment Seat of Christ where good works are rewarded and unworthy works are burned up (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The fire that burns the non-abiding branches in John 15:6 is in an allegory or figurative story that illustrates a point. Jesus is comparing some branches of a vine that are not abiding (implying they are not fruitful) to the possible fate of believers who do not abide. Jesus does not say that all unfruitful branches are burned, because all branches (Christians) are at some time unfruitful (because some must be "lifted up" to become fruitful; John 15:2). Vine branches that continue to be barren have no practical purpose, so they are gathered and burned. We do not need to find an antecedent for who "they" are. That is trying to make too much of the details of the allegory at the expense of the main point. The main point is that non-abiding fruitless branches are useless. In John 15:6 it is not people who are burned, but branches (signified by the neuter pronoun *auta*). Neither is it necessary to interpret the fire as literal, because the vine, branches, and fruit are all figurative. Jesus' point is that Christians who do not abide and bear fruit are useless. This is similar to the

illustration in Ezekiel 15:1-8 of Israel as a useless vine that is burned. If significance is attached to the fire in Ezekiel 15:6, it may compare to the burning of useless works at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Practical implications

If someone argues that a Christian must bear fruit to prove his or her salvation, then there must be a way to measure that fruit. But of course, that is impossible given our human inability to know for certain what comprises genuine fruit (See Grace Notes no. 28, "Can Good Works Prove Salvation?"). It also assumes that all fruit is observable when that is not always true. In the context, fruit seems to refer to loving one another. The command to love forms bookends for this section, and 1 John 3:24 also relates loving to abiding. Nevertheless, love is not a proof of salvation, but an indication of intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ and of discipleship (John 13:35).

Conclusion In John 15:6 Jesus is not teaching that fruitless superficial followers will be cast into hell. The interpretation that makes fruit-bearing a test of salvation in John 15:1-8 ignores the larger and immediate contexts as well as how words are used in the context. The result is a vague interpretation that can't actually be applied without defining objectively what fruit is and how much fruit is necessary to pass the test. A better interpretation yields a passage that deeply challenges Christians to become more intimate with the Lord Jesus Christ as a condition for bearing much fruit for His glory.

02.55. The Christian and Apostasy

GraceNotes - no. 55 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Christian and Apostasy As used here, apostasy refers to a departure from or denial of the Christian faith by someone who once held to it. There are several views about what happens to someone who leaves the faith. Some say a true Christian will never apostasize. Some say a true Christian can leave the faith, but he or she loses salvation. Others say a true Christian can depart from the faith, perhaps never return, yet never lose his or her salvation, but suffers other consequences.

Apostasy is clearly seen in the Bible.

It is easy to demonstrate that apostasy is taught or seen in the Bible. Consider these passages:

Peter denied the Lord. Luke 22:34, Luke 22:54-62 God's chosen nation, Israel, stopped believing. Romans 3:1-3; Romans 10:16-21. The apostle Paul predicts apostasy in later times. 1 Timothy 4:1-3 The warning of 1 Timothy 4:16 implies a Christian can depart from the faith.

There were widows in the church who "turned aside to follow Satan." 1 Timothy 5:14-15 The apostle Paul describes false teachers who strayed from the faith. 1 Timothy 6:20-21

Those who deserted the apostle Paul and opposed him (2 Timothy 1:15; 2 Timothy 4:9-10, 2 Timothy 4:14-16) are to be gently instructed so that they can escape the snares of Satan. 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

Hymenaeus and Philetus strayed from the truth. 2 Timothy 2:17-18 -Those in error can overthrow the faith of others. 2 Timothy 2:18 The book of Hebrews addresses those who were in danger of leaving the faith. Hebrews 2:1-3; Hebrews 6:4-6, Hebrews 10:26-39, Hebrews 12:25 True Christians can leave the faith.

It is clear from the passages listed above that those who apostasize are true Christians, otherwise the descriptions, warnings, and exhortations are empty and meaningless. The very idea that someone strays from something implies they once adhered to it. A person cannot desert something or some place that he or she has never experienced.

True Christians cannot lose salvation.

None of the examples listed above names hell or the loss of salvation as the result of leaving the faith. That conclusion can only be theologically driven. The punishments facing those who would depart from the faith in Hebrews are severe, but do not refer to hell (See GraceNotes no. 34, "Hebrews on Fire"). There are too many Bible passages that teach salvation can never be lost (See GraceNotes no. 24, "Eternally Secure").

While some think that any continual or serious sin causes a Christian to lose salvation, others say salvation is only lost if the person ceases to believe the gospel and the Christian faith. They say that the present tense of the verb "believe" in salvation passages like John 3:16 and John 20:31 implies that eternal life is conditioned on continual belief. But this is not an accurate understanding

of the present tense. The present tense can be used of a singular act (e.g. John 6:33, John 6:50; Acts 9:34). Besides, belief as the condition for eternal life is sometimes stated in the aorist tense, which implies completed action (Acts 2:44; Acts 4:32, Acts 8:13, Acts 16:31). The present tense in John 20:31 may also emphasize the ongoing experience of God's eternal life that Jesus referred to as abundant life (John 10:10) or knowing God (John 17:3). Initial faith in the gospel brings eternal salvation. Continual faith is not a condition for salvation, but for enjoying God's life in us (Romans 1:17; Galatians 2:20).

True Christians can leave the faith and suffer severe consequences. This view is well supported in the Bible. Many passages speak of God's discipline of the believer who departs from the faith (such as the warnings in Hebrews). One of the most helpful passages is 2 Timothy 2:11-13. This is a faithful saying:

11 For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.

12 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.

If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

2 Timothy 2:11 obviously speaks of our union with Christ that is a consequence of our salvation (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 2:20). Those who are saved will live forever with Christ. This speaks sufficiently to the impossibility of losing salvation. 2 Timothy 2:12, however, speaks of a different condition and a different consequence. The condition is endurance, which is often exhorted of Christians (e.g., 2 Timothy 2:3; Hebrews 10:23, Hebrews 10:36; Hebrews 12:1; James 1:2-4, James 1:12) and refers to perseverance in trials and suffering. The consequence of reigning does not refer to salvation, but to the reward for faithfulness - reigning with Christ in His kingdom. This reward is clearly taught in many other passages (Luke 19:11-19; Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 22:3-5). If we deny Christ by not enduring faithfully in trials, then He denies us His approval and reward (cf. Matthew 10:33; Luke 19:20-27). 2 Timothy 2:13 then speaks of another circumstance altogether. If we are "faithless" (*apisteuo*, without faith, unbelieving; cf. Romans 3:3), God remains "faithful" (*pistos*). What is God faithful to? He is faithful to His promise that we will live with Him forever, as stated in 2 Timothy 2:11 (cf. John 3:16; John 5:24, John 11:24-26). This does not refer to 2 Timothy 2:12 because it is intended as a comfort. It would be incongruous to appeal to the positive attribute of God's faithfulness to affirm God's negative discipline.

2 Timothy 2:11-13 is a serious affirmation of our eternal salvation which cannot be lost (unlike the reward of reigning with Christ). Even if we were to stop believing or become unfaithful, God will always be faithful to His promise to save us eternally. A good example of this is Israel, who now rejects Christ and is under God's discipline, but will one day be restored because God is faithful to the promises He made to Israel's patriarchs (Romans 3:3-4; Romans 11:25-32) and His gifts are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

Conclusion As Christians we can depart from the faith, deny the faith, or stop believing in Christ as our Savior. But since the security of our salvation depends on God's faithfulness, not our own, we can never lose eternal life. A Christian may leave the faith, but God never leaves the Christian. Apostasy from the faith does not forfeit salvation, though it will forfeit future rewards.

02.56. Does Grace Allow Christians to Judge Others?

GraceNotes - no. 56 by Dr. Charlie Bing Does Grace Allow Christians to Judge Others?

"Don't judge me!" In our age of tolerance, this statement has become a mantra used to stifle moral pronouncements and avoid responsibility for behavior. Some Christians might even say this to mean, "Don't tell me how to live; I'm under grace!" or accuse those who confront their behavior of being ungracious. Grace is also used as an excuse not to confront people. So is it gracious to judge another person?

Jesus' Words and Example The Lord Jesus Christ says, "Judge not, that you be not judged," (Matthew 7:1). But what does He mean? The word "judge" (krino) can have the negative meaning of condemn or criticize, or the neutral sense of consider, reach a decision. Here He obviously uses it in the negative sense. If Jesus meant that we are never to condemn someone's behavior, then He is inconsistent. His saying in Matthew 7:1 is part of the Sermon on the Mount which essentially condemns the attitude and behavior of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20; Matthew 6:5, Matthew 6:16, Matthew 7:15-23; cf. Matthew 23:1-36). Jesus also teaches that we should judge "not according to appearance," but with "righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Certainly, the scribes and Pharisees have the outward appearance of righteousness, but by God's perfect standard of righteousness, they fall miserably short.

Some use John 8:1-11 and Jesus' treatment of the woman caught in adultery to say that we should not judge others. Jesus shows grace by not advocating stoning her according to the Mosaic Law, but He also shows grace by telling her to "go and sin no more." Jesus does not veto the crowd's option to stone her; He simply invites those without sin to cast the first stone. According to His righteous judgment Jesus calls her adultery a sin but deals graciously with her. When someone should not judge another As in John 8:1-59, there are times when people should not judge others. In Matthew 7:2-6 and other passages reasons are given not to judge. When one has a critical or destructive spirit. In Matthew 7:2 Jesus' warning that those who judge will be judged in like manner explains why He prohibits critical judging in Matthew 7:1. This certainly applies to the scribes and Pharisees in John 8:1-59 (John 8:6 explains their destructive motive). James 2:13 also warns that Christians will be judged according to the mercy they extend to others, so if judgment would be destructive or unmerciful (ungracious), it is better not to judge. When one is blindly hypocritical. In Matthew 7:3-5 Jesus also explains that judgment should be withheld by people who haven't dealt with their own faults. The focus should not be on the "speck" in another's eye, but first the "beam" in one's own eye. After one takes care of his own problem, he can see clearly to judge another. The scribes and Pharisees were blindly self-righteousness while condemning everyone else (cf. Matthew 23:1-36). When one is ignorant of all the facts. It is easy to jump to conclusions about another's behavior and the motives behind it. But many times, the whole story is not known. Only God knows that. No one always knows another's motives. The Apostle Paul was not even willing to judge himself, but he put his judgment into God's hand (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). When one is confronted by behavior not clearly addressed in the Bible. The only way to have

"righteous judgment" is to know the clear righteous standards given in God's Word. However, the Bible does not address all behaviors and choices. Sometimes Christians with differing scruples disagree over issues that are considered questionable or neutral in nature (for example, watching certain TV programs or celebrating holidays with certain traditions). The gracious attitude in such instances is not to critically judge others, but to love and build them up leaving their judgment to God (cf. Romans 14:1-23). When someone may judge another Christians can and should use their biblical discernment to judge another in the sense of considering an issue in order to reach a helpful decision or verdict. Several conditions allow one to judge. When one can speak without hypocrisy. Jesus does say that one can judge another, but only after one first removes the "beam" from his or her own eye (Matthew 7:5). It is a good thing to help a "brother" by pointing out a "speck" of a defective behavior or attitude, but only if one can do it unhypocritically. When one knows the Bible speaks clearly about an issue. Christians have an obligation to judge false teaching (Matthew 7:15-20; Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 6:3) and obvious immorality (1 Corinthians 5:3, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13). Christians are commanded to have discernment and to use it (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). The Bible gives clear directions about many issues of morality so that we can avoid them or confront them (2 Timothy 3:16). When one is settling issues between church members. The very reason a Christian is not to judge those outside the church is the reason he or she should judge those in the church (1 Corinthians 5:12-13, 1 Corinthians 6:1-5). Those outside generally have a defective moral compass and no absolute sense of morality. But those in the true believing church have God's Word as a basis for discerning behavior and reaching decisions about issues or disagreements among church members. When one is motivated by love to help or restore others. Before restoring someone who has sinned, one must be able to recognize that person's behavior as sinful (Galatians 6:1). Jesus tells the adulterous woman, "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Church discipline also requires judgments about sinful behavior in an individual (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

Conclusion

Grace does not teach unconditional tolerance or acceptance of another's sinful behavior, but it does respect legitimate differences of opinion. Grace embraces a person's heart, not a person's behavior. It does the loving thing, which is to humbly and lovingly speak the truth a person needs to hear. Those who say, "Don't judge me!" are likely judging their own behavior as acceptable. They are intolerant of other views and are judging the pronouncements of God's Word as incompetent, inconsiderate, or incorrect. The Bible does not prohibit judgment of others if it is done in a humble, gentle, and loving manner. An attitude of grace means that we help people by lovingly telling them what they need to hear, even if they judge us for it!

02.57. Good Ground for Discipleship - Luke 8:4-13

GraceNotes - no. 57 by Dr. Charlie Bing Good Ground for Discipleship - Luke 8:4-13 And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Luke 4:4-8 (NKJ) The parable of the soils is found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:2-20; Luke 8:4-15). Our focus will be on Luke's account. In Luke especially, Jesus used this parable to explain the purpose of all parables and to illustrate how people respond to God's truth. This parable fits Luke's purpose of recording the life of Jesus in such a way as to generate faith in the unsaved and cultivate fruitfulness in the saved. Fruitfulness is a chief characteristic of a disciple (John 15:8). The parable shows the centrality of God's Word in salvation and discipleship, and how some who believe do not persevere in faithfulness to God's Word to become fruitful. The Parable's Design The parable is straightforward in its details. The sower is mentioned first, but recedes into the background as the fate of the seed and the condition of the soils take center focus. Clearly the emphasis is not the sower, nor the seed itself, but the fate of the seed determined by various types of soil.

Jesus concludes the parable with "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Luke 8:8). This indicates that truth will only be perceived by those receptive to it. After Jesus tells the parable, the disciples question its meaning, which elicits this explanation of God's design for parables - to enlighten those who are receptive to the truth about God's kingdom and to conceal truth from those not receptive to it (Luke 8:9-10). Then Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9 where Isaiah was told his ministry would not be received by all. Isaiah and Jesus both ministered to the nation of Israel which as a whole was unresponsive to their message, though individuals received it. The Parable's Context In Jesus' interpretation the sower is not mentioned, giving prominence to the seed as God's Word. The surrounding contexts point to God's Word as the revealed truth centered on Jesus' identity as the Messiah. Preceding the parable, John the Baptist questioned Jesus' identity (Luke 7:18-21) to which Jesus responded with Messianic claims (Luke 7:22-28). The Pharisees and lawyers were predisposed to reject Christ's testimony (Luke 7:30), which Jesus saw as characteristic of the whole generation who rejected Him (Luke 7:31-35). In contrast to the Pharisee's blindness (pictured in the character of Simon) is the story of the sinful woman who recognizes Jesus and is saved (Luke 7:36-50).

Following the parable, Luke recounts the story of Jesus' mother and brothers who tried to approach him but were hindered by the crowd. Jesus uses the occasion to proclaim that His true spiritual mother and brothers "are these who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:19-21). With this explanation, Jesus sets forth His condition for intimate and fruitful discipleship that was taught by the parable - responsive obedience to God's Word (Compare John 8:31; John 15:7-8, John

17:6). The Parable's Interpretation

Jesus interprets His parable in Luke 8:11-15. In His explanation to the disciples, Jesus says the seed that fell on the impacted wayside was snatched away by the devil. The devil keeps the Word away from their hearts so that these ones never believe and are therefore never eternally saved. The second soil represents those who believe but fall away. Some people interpret this faith as superficial, but the only deficiency is its duration, not its sincerity. While the details of a parable should never be emphasized at the expense of the main point, neither should the clear statements of a parable be ignored. If Jesus says these people believed, then they believed, if only for a while. Temptation causes them to fall away, which seems to indicate falling away from the truth of the gospel. While it is not specified what the temptation is, it appears to be something that challenges their faith in the truth of God's Word, perhaps false doctrine or persecution (Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:17).

True believers can fall into false doctrine (thus the many New Testament warnings) or be unwilling to take up their cross and suffer for Christ, an important condition for discipleship (Luke 9:23). In any case, falling away does not mean that these believers lose their salvation. The parable is about conditions for persevering in fruitfulness, not persevering in salvation.

Those pictured by the third soil clearly show life, but growth is choked into fruitlessness. Actually, there is mention of some fruit, but it is stunted, immature. This is due to the cares, riches, and pleasures of life that distract these believers from growing in God's truth. Jesus later teaches that a chief characteristic of a disciple is that he deny himself (Luke 9:23), something these believers did not do. The purpose of God's Word is to bring people to faith and to fruitfulness. This is pictured by the good soil, described as those having "a noble and good heart." The focus of the parable is not on the activity of the sower or the power of the Word, but on the predisposition of a person's heart. It does not explain why some hearts are predisposed to fall away from truth, or are distracted by worldly pleasures, or are open and receptive to the truth, only that they are. Temptations and distractions to one's faith do not in themselves explain why some hearts are not fertile soil for growth. Certainly the fruitful believers were exposed to both, but because of their good hearts they were fertile and therefore fruitful. In the end and from the human perspective, believers are responsible for their own hearts and how they respond to God's Word. Persevering in God's truth is the key to fruitfulness. This is not perseverance in order to be saved, but perseverance in living out the Word of God. The responsibility of the hearer is emphasized by the parable that follows the parable of the soils (Luke 8:18). The one who has the light and shares the light is a receptive person. The warning Christ gives is "Therefore take heed how you hear." So one's predisposition of heart is not something that can be blamed on exterior circumstances, but it comes from a habit of cultivation of the truth and seeking what is good. To good and faithful stewards of the truth, God gives more truth. The Parable's Applications

Those who sow God's Word should spread it to everyone, but with the awareness that people will respond differently. They should therefore seek to cultivate those who are receptive and fruitful. The sower should spread God's Word, not his own. To the extent that the Word of God is diminished in our message, the responsibility of man to receive and obey it is diminished. This would promote the importance of expository preaching and teaching. God's Word taught in context has the authority to convict, change lives, and bear fruit. Discipleship programs should target the

person's heart with the Word of God.

Finally, we should monitor our own hearts lest we succumb to false teaching or worldly distractions that stunt our fruitfulness for the Lord. One sure way to receive more from the Lord is to share more from the Lord by setting our light on a stand for all to see. Faithful disciples bear fruit and bring God's truth to the world.

02.58. Do Believers Need to Confess Their Sins for Forgiveness?

GraceNotes - no. 58 by Dr. Charlie Bing Do Believers Need to Confess Their Sins for Forgiveness?

According to the Bible, when someone believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, that person's sins are forgiven. If that is so, should Christians continue to confess their post-salvation sins after believing in Christ? Some say that confession is unnecessary since all the believer's sins are forgiven already. What is the scriptural perspective? The Believer's Positional Forgiveness To the Christian, forgiveness means to be released or freed from the guilt of sins as a personal offense in a relationship. One of the results of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior is that God forgives the believer's sins that were an offense against Him. In this sense, forgiveness is granted once for all eternity. It is a positional truth like justification and redemption, which is why forgiveness is sometimes linked in the Scriptures with eternal salvation. In the Gospels, the positional aspect of forgiveness is seen by its contrast with eternal condemnation (Mark 3:28-29). Jesus and His death (blood) secures this remission of (release from) sin (Matthew 26:28). In this way He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He paid the ransom for all people (Matthew 20:28). Ransom implies release or freedom from the guilt of sin for all who receive it. Forgiveness is used in other salvation contexts in Acts (Acts 5:31; Acts 13:38-39; Acts 26:17-18). The Apostle Paul makes some definitive statements about the positional forgiveness that occurs at the time of justification. In Romans 4:5-7 he links forgiveness with justification through faith. Also, in Ephesians 1:7 Paul describes one of the benefits of being in Christ: "In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Similarly, in Colossians 2:13 he says, "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." In the surrounding context, it is clear that Paul is speaking of a benefit of the believer's new position and identity with Christ (Colossians 2:11-12, Colossians 2:14). "Trespasses" is virtually synonymous with sins. The verb "having forgiven" is in the Greek aorist tense signifying a completed action. The action that is completed is the forgiveness of "all" sins, which includes even future sins because all the believer's sins were future when Jesus died on the cross. In two similarly worded passages, Paul argues that Christians should forgive one another because Christ has forgiven them (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). The author of Hebrews also asserts positional forgiveness in Hebrews 10:17-18 by citing the result of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:34 in terms of "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

Clearly, all these passages show that those who have believed in Jesus Christ as Savior have had all their sins forgiven on the basis of Jesus' full and final payment on the cross. So why must Christians confess their sins? The Believer's Fellowship Forgiveness

Christians must confess their sins so that they can experience the forgiveness that is theirs positionally. In other words, because of Jesus' death on the cross and one's faith in Him, sin's power to condemn is annulled forever, but it still has power to sever a believer's experience of

fellowship with the Heavenly Father. The first is a judicial forgiveness, the latter a family forgiveness. Because of judicial forgiveness, the Christian has the privilege of enjoying fellowship or communion with God in the Christian walk, but this privilege can be abused or interrupted by sin. The believer's fellowship with God is the theme of First John (1 John 1:3-4; See GraceNotes no. 37, "Interpreting 1 John"). This fellowship depends on walking truthfully in the light of God's Word and God's will (1 John 1:5-8). As a believer walks in the light, sins become visible or apparent. When God brings these sins to mind and convicts the conscience, the believer can deny the truth about his or her sin or confess them to God. According to 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." To confess literally means "to say the same thing," thus "to acknowledge, to agree." Upon that honest confession, God forgives because He is "faithful" to His own character and His commitment to His children. He is also "just" because He has accepted His Son's payment for that sin. Because God is faithful and just, the believer's confession restores fellowship with God. Given the theme of fellowship, 1 John 1:9 is obviously intended for those who are saved, not the unsaved (note that John uses "we!").

John understood this principle well. His Gospel includes the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. In that account, when Peter tries to refuse washing, Jesus says, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean" (John 13:10). The reference to bathing and complete cleansing is a reference to positional forgiveness, but the washing of feet pictures the ongoing necessity of forgiveness and cleansing from sins committed as a Christian.

King David also understood the principle of confessing sin to restore fellowship. After his sin with Bathsheeba and Uriah, he confesses his sin to restore fellowship with God (Psalms 32:5). Similarly, in Psalms 51:1-19, David confesses his sin to receive cleansing and to restore the joy of his fellowship with God. David's salvation was not the issue; his fellowship was.

Jesus taught the principle of confession to restore fellowship with God and others in the familiar Lord's Prayer (better called the Disciples' Prayer). He taught that believers should pray "And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us" (Luke 11:4). Thus He taught the necessity of forgiveness to restore the believer's relationship vertically to God and horizontally to other people. There are many other passages where confession of sin is the basis for restoring fellowship in the divine or human relationships (Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21, Luke 17:3-4, 2 Corinthians 2:7, 2 Corinthians 2:10, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13). Simply put, confession restores fellowship in a relationship, whether divine or human.

Conclusion

There is no question that believers have the secure position of having all their sins forgiven on the basis of Jesus Christ's full payment on the cross. However, a believer's experience often contradicts his or her position. Sins committed after justification do not jeopardize the believer's positional forgiveness, but adversely affect the believer's enjoyment of that position and his or her fellowship with God. To restore the joy of fellowship, the believer is taught to confess sins to God who will forgive and cleanse from the guilt of those sins. An illustration may help. If a son offends his father, the father may agree to absorb the pain of the offense and forgive the son. In the father's eyes, the son is forgiven. However, to fully experience the father's forgiveness and enjoy fellowship in the relationship, the son must acknowledge (confess) his offense to his father. God is

a Heavenly Father, a God of love and grace, who will always restore fellowship with those who seek forgiveness for their sins.

02.59. Real Christians Don't Sin? - 1 John 3:6, 9

GraceNotes - no. 59 by Dr. Charlie Bing Real Christians Don't Sin? - 1 John 3:6, 1 John 3:9
Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him or known Him. 1 John 3:6 (NKJ)

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. 1 John 3:9 (NKJ)

Many have a difficult time with these verses (and similarly 1 John 5:18 and other verses in 1 John, which cannot be included in this study), because they seem to contradict experience and contradict 1 John 1:8 which says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," and 1 John 1:9 that tells Christians that "we" should confess our sins. So if John establishes the fact that Christians sin in 1 John 1:1-10, how can he say later that Christians do not sin? An incorrect interpretation of these verses has caused many Christians to doubt their salvation. A Proper Understanding of the Epistle's Purpose That these verses are written to Christians is beyond question. The purpose of the epistle is to encourage the readers' fellowship with both God and the apostles in order to make the readers' joy full (1 John 1:2-3). The readers are addressed in many ways as believers. Even 1 John 3:1-24 begins with a clear statement that they, like the author, are children of God (1 John 3:1-3; see GraceNotes no. 37, "Interpreting 1 John"). A Proper Understanding of Key Words

It helps to look carefully at a few of the words John uses. In 1 John 3:6 John does not say "Whoever believes in Him does not sin," but "Whoever abides in Him . . ." That John understands believe and abide differently is clear from John 8:31 where he writes, "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, 'If you abide in My word you are my disciples indeed.'" Believe is the condition for anyone who wants to be eternally saved, but abide is a condition for anyone who wants to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The two are not the same. To believe is to be convinced of something, to abide means to remain or continue (in a sphere). The sphere John wants them to remain in is declared in his purpose statement as fellowship with God through Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3; see also 1 John 1:6-7). His exhortation to his readers, who he affectionately calls "little children," is "abide in Him" (Jesus). So John has in view Christians who remain in fellowship with Jesus Christ—these Christians do not sin.

We must also carefully define the two verbs that are stated as negative consequences in 1 John 3:6 : "neither seen Him or known Him." Though these verbs are sometimes used by John in relation to salvation (John 3:36; John 4:42, John 6:69, John 8:28, John 10:38), they are also sometimes used by him to describe a deeper experience of more intimate knowledge of the Savior. Most lexicons recognize that "see" (horaō) can refer to one's perception and experience of something, especially in John's literature (compare John 6:36; John 12:45, John 14:9, John 15:24, 3 John 1:11). Likewise, John sometimes uses "know" (ginosko) to describe personal acquaintance, familiarity, or fellowship (John 14:7, John 14:9, John 17:3). We find in verse 6 that to see and to know both describe a deeper acquaintance with Jesus Christ. They are words well

suited for John's purpose in 1 John—fellowship with God.

Simply put, John is saying that those who remain in fellowship with Jesus Christ do not sin. Those who sin do not have the intimate experience with the Lord that is available to all believers. A Proper Understanding of the Present Tense

Some have claimed that since the verbs sin (hamartano) and poieo (to do, to commit, to practice, used with the noun sin in 1 Timothy 3:9) are in the present tense, they mean keeps on sinning or continues to practice sin. In other words, they say John is not talking about occasional sin or sin in an absolute sense, but habitual repeated sin (called iterative action). Some Bible translations reflect this interpretation in verse 6 and/or 1 Timothy 3:9 (e.g., NIV, NET Bible, ESV, NASB). However, if used in a habitual sense, the present tense would need additional words that clearly indicate repeated action. There is nothing inherent in the present tense itself that demands a continual or repetitive action, and John's readers should not be expected to catch such a subtle use of the present tense. A habitual use of the present tense in 1 Timothy 1:8 and 1 Timothy 5:16 would be inconsistent with its use in 1 Timothy 3:9. (Also, try making sense of a continuous action in a verse like John 6:33—"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven . . .") Apparently, this mistranslation of the present tense is theologically derived and assigned by those who teach that those who are genuinely saved will not persevere in sin.

There are other problems as well. What sins would qualify as habitual—anger, pride, lust, or prayerlessness? And when should a sin be considered habitual—if committed once a day, once a week, once a month, or once a year? The absolute use of the present tense for the verb sin, not the habitual use, makes perfect sense when we understand what John says about the new nature. A Proper Understanding of the New Nature In 1 John 3:5 John says that Jesus Christ came to take away our sins and "in Him there is no sin." Then 1 John 3:6 says that when Christians are abiding in Jesus they do not sin—it is impossible to sin because there is no sin in Him. If believers abide in the sinless Christ, 1 John 3:9 says they cannot sin. Fellowship with Him never results in sin!

1 John 3:9 puts this truth in terms of the new nature that the Christian receives in regeneration. God's "seed" in the believer refers to new life that gives the believer a new nature. A sinless parent begets sinless children. The believer's new nature from God never expresses itself by sinning, therefore those believers who sin are not in fellowship with or abiding in Jesus Christ. (The Apostle Paul also wrote about the manifestation of the believer's old and new natures in passages like Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 2:20.) With this understanding of the new nature, there is no need to translate the present tense in 1 John 3:9 as habitual in order to harmonize with 1 John 1:8. In 1 John 1:8 John speaks of the Christian in his general experience, but in 1 John 3:9 he speaks of the Christian viewed through his new nature, just as in 1 John 3:6 he speaks of the Christian as one who is abiding in Christ.

Conclusion

Real Christians sin, and sometimes sin seriously and repeatedly. We know this from experience and from the testimony of Scripture. But when the Christian is abiding in fellowship with Jesus Christ, it is impossible to sin because in that sphere—in Christ Himself, there is no sin. Jesus came to take away the sin of the world. He did that provisionally when He died on the cross for sin, and He does that experientially for all believers who abide in Him. Without this understanding,

many Christians will doubt their salvation because they know that they sin. God's grace gives us not only a way to avoid sin (1 John 3:6, 1 John 3:9), but also a remedy when we do (1 John 1:9).

02.60. Can a Christian Be of the Devil? - 1 John 3:8, 10

GraceNotes - no. 60 by Dr. Charlie Bing Can a Christian Be of the Devil? - 1 John 3:8, 1 John 3:10

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Those who read 1 John carefully will notice John's use of absolute contrasts: light/darkness, know God/not know God, love his brother/hate his brother, life/death, Christ/Antichrist. Some find especially troublesome the contrast of children of God/children of the devil. Who is being called "children of the devil?" Is there any way a Christian can be "of the devil," or could that only refer to unsaved people?

Recalling the context

Any study of the particulars of 1 John must start with the spiritual state of the readers and the purpose of the epistle. It is clear that the readers are Christians, even in the immediate context of our passages under consideration. In 1 John 3:10 it is stated that the one "not of God" does not love "his brother." Only a Christian has a spiritual brother. It is also clear that John's purpose for writing is to enhance fellowship between the readers, God, and the apostolic circle (1 John 1:3-4), not to propose tests by which the readers can know they are eternally saved (These issues are discussed in detail in GraceNotes no. 37, "Interpreting 1 John.").

Christians sin

If this passage is saying that those who sin and are of the devil are unsaved, then all professing Christians are unsaved, because all Christians sin. That is made clear in 1 John 1:7-10. Some translators have yielded to their theological systems to translate the present tense of the verb poieo (to do) in 1 John 1:8 as "practices sin" as if John is referring only to habitual sin (as they also translate the verb sin, hamartano, in 1 John 1:9 as "practice[s] sin" or "continue to sin." See the ESV, NASB, NET, NIV). This would demand the readers impose a subtlety of interpretation on the present tense that is not normal or readily apparent in the text (This argument applies to the present tense in 1 John 3:6-7, and 1 John 3:9 which is discussed in GraceNotes no. 59, "Real Christians Don't Sin?"). The habitual interpretation of the present tense introduces troublesome subjective issues of how much sin, what kind of sin, and how often can one sin, which make the test-of-salvation interpretation a disaster to any Christian who is introspective at all. The Scriptures remind us that Christians sin and are even capable of murder (James 4:2; 1 Peter 4:15). A question of origins By his use of contrasts, John is distinguishing two different sources for Christian behavior. He did this in 1 John 3:9 where the believer in his regenerate person cannot sin because Jesus Christ cannot sin. That means sin must come from elsewhere, which is ultimately the devil who "has sinned from the beginning" (1 John 3:8). It was the devil who deceived man into sin causing man to have a sin nature. Sin is contrary to Jesus Christ's purpose

which was to destroy the devil's works. Satan and Christ are totally at odds in their purposes and characters. When a believer does right, he manifests his God-given divine nature (1 John 3:9), but when he sins, he manifests his Satan-inspired sin nature (1 John 3:8, 1 John 3:10). The word "children" (tekna) in reference to God or the devil is not used biologically as in a genetic relationship, but is used for those who have characteristics derived from another person, that is, a kind or class of persons (It is used this way in Matthew 11:19/Luke 7:35; Galatians 4:31; Ephesians 2:3; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Peter 3:6.). John is simply noting the ultimate origin of a believer's actions. The example of Cain murdering Abel in 1 John 3:12 is a physical illustration of this spiritual truth. It is not a statement about whether Cain was saved or not; it only shows that Cain's action was inspired by his envy of Abel which was ultimately inspired by the devil (who "was a murderer from the beginning;" John 8:44). Similarly, when Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23), He was revealing the source of Peter's rebuke of Christ by which Peter demonstrated that he was representing Satan's purpose, not God's. The Apostle Paul wrote that a believer can be taken captive by Satan to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26; Compare Acts 5:3). James 3:15-17 shows that there are two sources for a believer's choices, one that is demonic (Satan's) and one that is from above (God's). The New Testament perspective is clear: at times believers can do the work of the devil.

Conclusion

Christians sin, and when they do, their actions must be sourced in the devil's influence, not God's. Sin does not prove that one is not a Christian, only that he is representing the devil and his will. A Christian shows himself to be a child of the devil or "of the devil" by doing the devil's will and works. It is futile and damaging to test one's salvation or try to prove one is unsaved by the reality of sin in one's life. The only test of salvation given in 1 John is whether one has believed in and possesses Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1 John 5:1, 1 John 5:11-13). That is the only test that keeps the gospel of grace totally free from human merit or performance.

02.61. The Salvation of Those Who Endure to the End in Matthew 24:13

GraceNotes - no. 61 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Salvation of Those Who Endure to the End in Matthew 24:13 "But he who endures to the end shall be saved." Matthew 24:13 This passage (See also Matthew 10:22; Mark 13:13; cf. Luke 21:19) is often used to argue that only those who continue in faith and good works to the end of their lives will receive salvation or prove they were saved. In other words, if professing Christians do not persevere in faith and good works, it proves they were never really eternally saved. Though this interpretation may be held by other Christians, it is central to the Reformed Calvinists' belief called "Perseverance of the Saints" (See GraceNotes no. 49, "Perseverance Versus Preservation.").

Context is Everything This passage cannot be understood properly apart from the context. It is clear that Matthew (and Mark) is speaking about conditions in the time of Israel's great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21) immediately before Jesus Christ returns (Christ's return is also in view in the context of Matthew 10:22; see Matthew 10:23). Here, Jesus is answering the disciples' question about His return (Matthew 24:3-4) and the signs that will accompany it. In that time of great sorrow, the Jews will be hated and some will be killed by the other nations (Matthew 24:9), betrayed by their own countrymen (Matthew 24:10), deceived by false prophets (Matthew 24:11), and experience lawlessness and a lack of natural affection (Matthew 24:12). After Matthew 24:13, Jesus' prophecy conveys the details that actually describe His coming (Matthew 24:14 ff.). This is a prophecy that relates to the end time in the Tribulation period. The End of What? That the end of one's life is not addressed here is clear by how the "end" is used throughout the passage. Beginning with the disciples' question about the "end of the age" in Matthew 24:3, Jesus gives information about that end mentioning it in Matthew 24:6 and Matthew 24:14. It is clear Jesus refers to the end of the Tribulation period that will come upon the whole earth.

Though many in Israel will be killed, those who endure these perils to the end of the Tribulation will be delivered ("saved") from their enemies, who are the nations which hate them. This is simply an occasion when the word "saved" refers to deliverance from danger, not deliverance from hell. Indeed, hell is not mentioned in the passage and would be out of place. This "last-minute rescue" of the remnant of Israel by Jesus Christ is a prophesied biblical event (Zechariah 12:2-9; Romans 11:26). Later in Jesus' response, He says that when He returns He will "gather His elect" from all over the world, a reference to His chosen nation, Israel, and their deliverance at the end of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:31). The endurance spoken of in Matthew 24:13 refers to persisting in faith through the severe suffering and persecutions of that period (Matthew 24:10-12). Some Israelites will be martyred (Matthew 24:9), but those who live to the end will see a glorious "salvation." Jesus declares that the final days will be shortened lest none survive to see that deliverance (Matthew 24:22).

Problems with Perseverance This passage should never be used to teach a doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints. Not only does the context prohibit it, but the doctrine itself is flawed.

While those who say professing Christians must persevere in order to prove they are genuinely saved, they would not usually admit that perseverance is a work that earns salvation. Of course, this is convoluted reasoning, because if perseverance is necessary to prove salvation, then perseverance is necessary to have salvation. This is in addition to one's initial faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Salvation would be by faith plus one's performance (perseverance), which contradicts the nature of God's free grace.

Conclusion

Israel's history is a story of God's grace. They were chosen by Him to be a special people. In spite of constant sin, God preserved them throughout their history. He will save them in the future as well, not because they deserve it, but because He is faithful to His promise to do so. Matthew 24:13 is a special promise about the end-time remnant of Israel who persist in faith through the great Tribulation and live to experience this great deliverance. Like Israel, we who are saved by God's grace are kept saved by grace, and will be glorified ultimately and finally by His grace; not because we deserve it or persevere, but because that is God's promise to all who believe (John 3:16; John 5:24, Romans 8:29). However, unlike Israel, Christians alive today will not go through the great Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:9).

02.62. You are Saved, if you Hold Fast - 1 Corinthians 15:1-2

GraceNotes - no. 62 by Dr. Charlie Bing You are Saved, if you Hold Fast - 1 Corinthians 15:1-2

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. - 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 To many people this passage seems to give salvation, then take it away. It implies that the gospel saved us, but does not continue to save us unless we "hold fast" to it. Some use this passage to say that believers can lose their salvation. Others say that it shows that some who are considered believers prove to be false believers because they did not stick with the gospel. Neither of these views satisfies the details of the passage in its context.

What Happened, Is Happening, Could Happen

Though some in the Corinthian church were beginning to deny the resurrection of Christ, it is very clear from the passage that the Apostle Paul is sure about their position: They had "received" and "believed" the gospel that he had preached to them (the past tenses denote completed action) and they now "stand" in that gospel (the perfect tense denotes past action with continuing results). Their stand refers to their positional justification, which is unquestioned and was affirmed earlier: "you were justified" (1 Corinthians 6:11). There is no question that Paul's letter addresses the Corinthians as genuine believers (See 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Corinthians 1:4, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 4:14, 1 Corinthians 6:11, 1 Corinthians 6:15, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Corinthians 12:13). However, the present tense "you are saved" clearly depends on the condition "if you hold fast that word" referring to the gospel. Does this mean that the readers can lose their salvation or prove they were never truly saved if they do not "hold fast"?

You Are Being Saved The view that Paul is telling the readers that they can lose or disprove their salvation comes from rigidly defining "are saved" as salvation from hell. The basic definition of "saved" is delivered or preserved, and is used in the Bible for deliverance from a number of things (illness, death, enemies, danger, sin). This requires us to ask "Delivered from what?" As the letter to the Corinthians shows, these believers had a lot of sin issues from which they needed deliverance. The sequence of thought is important: Paul preached the gospel, the Corinthians received it, and they now stand in it. What's left is to experience that salvation in an on-going sense, thus Paul uses the present tense "you are [being] saved." If Paul were speaking of hell, he would have spoken more naturally of their final salvation: "you will be saved."

If You Hold Fast The experience of on-going deliverance from sin in the believer's life has a condition: One must "hold fast" to the gospel. This is not an assumed accomplishment or a hypothetical condition, but a real one (The Greek first class condition does not justify the translation of "if" as "since."). The verb for "hold fast" (katecho) is used in the New Testament in relation to the Christian's sanctification experience (See Luke 8:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:21;

Hebrews 10:23). Paul is saying that the Corinthians must continue to follow the truth that they learned from the gospel in order to experience its sanctifying effects. This is not a condition of eternal salvation, but a very real condition of sanctification. It is therefore possible for believers not to hold fast. The New Testament shows that believers may not persevere or hold fast to the truth (1 Timothy 5:14-15; 1 Timothy 6:20-21, 2 Timothy 1:5, 2 Timothy 2:17-18, 2 Timothy 2:24-26, 2 Timothy 4:9-10, 2 Timothy 4:14-16). The Gospel and Its Results

Based on the gospel he preached and they received (believed), Paul can say that the Corinthians "stand" in its salvation. Their position is secure, however their experience of being delivered (saved) by the provision of the same gospel is dependent on their steadfastness to its truth. That is why Paul reminds them of the gospel he preached to them in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 : "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." It is the same gospel he had "received" early in his ministry (Galatians 1:11-12; Galatians 2:16), "preached" to them on his first visit (Acts 18:1-8), and explained to them earlier in the epistle (1 Corinthians 1:17-21; 1 Corinthians 2:5). The word saved then, is being used to describe the experience of living out the truths of the gospel which center on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ is not only the basis of one's salvation from hell, it is also the basis of one's identity and experience as a Christian. In Romans 6:2-5 Paul teaches that the believer's union with Christ is the basis for a life of victory over sin. As Christ died and arose, so also those who are in Him have died to sin and have been raised with Him to walk in a new life. No one can be delivered from sin unless they continue to identify with the death and resurrection of Christ taught in the gospel. This is what Paul means by "if you hold fast that word which I preached to you." Any defect in the gospel or our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection will result in a defective Christian experience. In other words, if the Corinthians do not continue to hold to the gospel Paul preached, they would have "believed in vain" because their initial faith in the gospel would not produce a sanctifying experience in them, which is one of its intended results. The term "in vain" means to no avail. It is used in the New Testament to describe something that does not reach its intended goal; it is never used to question the reality of the action associated with it (For example, see 1 Corinthians 15:10, 1 Corinthians 15:58). If the Corinthians deny the resurrection of Christ, they cannot be delivered from sinful living, which makes their initial faith in the gospel fall short of its intended result of their sanctification.

Conclusion No wonder Paul makes the gospel his priority: "I delivered to you first of all" (1 Corinthians 15:3; Some Bibles translate it "of first importance"). We have to get the gospel right to be saved (from hell), but we must also get the gospel right to keep on getting saved (from sin). The deliverance God wants for us is not only from the penalty of sin (our justification), but also from the power of sin (our sanctification) and the presence of sin (our glorification). As Christians, it is crucial we understand what it means to be united with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. If we keep the gospel straight, our walk will be also. The gospel that initially saves us is the same gospel that keeps saving us and the gospel that ultimately saves us - and it's all by God's grace!

02.63. Were Jesus' First Disciples Called to Salvation or Discipleship?

GraceNotes - no. 63 by Dr. Charlie Bing Were Jesus' First Disciples Called to Salvation or Discipleship?

"Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.'" Matthew 4:19

Jesus' encounter with the fishermen at the Sea of Galilee is the first recorded meeting in Matthew and Mark of these men who became His first disciples (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). Some readers assume that Jesus invites Andrew, Peter, James, and John to salvation. Their view requires that salvation is obtained by following Jesus, with the implication that every Christian must be a committed follower. In other words, there is no distinction between being a Christian and being a disciple. Is the call to follow a call to be saved? The Purpose for Jesus' Invitation The reason Jesus calls these fishermen to follow is clarified with his explanatory statement: "I will make you fishers of men." Jesus obviously speaks of the work of evangelism that leads others to eternal life. If Jesus is calling these fishermen to salvation, then the passage teaches we are saved by following Christ in such a way that we are leading others to salvation. This would be an odd condition for salvation—only soul winners would be saved! It could also cause many Christians to doubt their salvation if they haven't led anyone to Christ or are not active in evangelism. Salvation would be a process ("I will make you become fishers of men." Mark 1:17 b), not an instant transaction. The Timing of Jesus' Invitation

There is no reason to assume that this is Jesus' first encounter with Andrew, Peter, James, and John. On the contrary, John 1:35-42 is good evidence that Andrew and Peter, at least, had met Jesus earlier than the Sea of Galilee meeting, since John clearly records Peter's first introduction to the Lord. John records that Andrew and Peter met Jesus "beyond Jordan" where John the Baptist was baptizing, not at the Sea of Galilee (John 1:28, John 1:43). In John's account, Peter is brought to Jesus, but in Matthew and Mark, Jesus comes to Peter. When we compare the setting and circumstances, we see a different encounter than that recorded by Matthew and Mark. By the same measure, Luke 5:1-11 is also a different story from Matthew and Mark's account. Though the seaside setting and Jesus' promise that Peter will "catch men" (Luke 5:10) make them sound similar, we find no crowd pressing Jesus; He is alone. He is also walking, not standing as in Matthew and Mark's account, and the fishermen are in the boat, not on shore washing their nets. Finally, it is said of the disciples that "they forsook all" (Luke 5:11), whereas in Matthew and Mark's accounts they only forsook their nets, boats, and father. Luke also mentions the miraculous catch of fish, an event that is not mentioned and does not fit in Matthew and Mark's account. Since all these men were fishermen in Galilee, Jesus' homeland, they surely would have encountered Jesus and His teaching more than once. The Meaning of Jesus' Invitation By observing these details, we see that Jesus' call to "Follow Me" is to men who either already met Him and identified Him as the Messiah (as with Andrew and Peter in John 1:35-42 –as a disciple of John the Baptist, Andrew certainly believed what John taught about the coming Messiah) or had at least known of

Him (in the case of James and John). Since eternal life and salvation are not mentioned in the invitation, it is clear that Jesus is inviting men who had already met and believed in Him to become His disciples. In the first century, to become a disciple meant to follow and learn from a teacher or teachers (for example, the Gospels mention disciples of Moses, disciples of the Pharisees, and disciples of John the Baptist. See John 9:28; Mark 2:18). For these fishermen, this means they have to commit to leaving their work, their source of income, and even their families, which they did. They need to reorient their purpose in life to match that of their Master, Jesus, which was to fish for men, or share His gospel. The call to discipleship is costly and invites believers to take up God's purpose for their lives. It involves a lifetime of growth and service based on commitment. Throughout His ministry, Jesus continually challenges his disciples to deeper commitments of following, even repeating the call to "follow" (See Luke 9:23; John 21:19, John 21:22). Andrew, Peter, James, and John could believe in Jesus Christ and remain fishermen, or they could also commit to follow Jesus Christ's call to become fishers of men. The Assumption of Jesus' Invitation

The invitation to become a disciple and follow Jesus as Master assumes that someone has already come to know Jesus as Savior. In salvation, a person comes to understand that Jesus saves from sin and gives eternal life as a free gift, but in discipleship, a person understands that he can respond to God's grace in salvation by devoting his life to following Jesus with a new purpose. Salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. To make conditions of discipleship (such as Luke 9:23; Luke 14:26; John 8:31) conditions of salvation inserts commitment, obedience, and ultimately works in the gospel, which denies God's free grace. Theologically, we would say this confuses justification (salvation from the penalty of sin) with sanctification (salvation from the power of sin). All disciples are Christians, but not all Christians are necessarily disciples.

Conclusion

Jesus' encounter with the fishermen at the Sea of Galilee shows us that believers are called to become disciples. That is still God's desire for every believer. The distinction between the condition for salvation (faith) and the conditions for discipleship (following, etc.) is crucial in keeping the gospel free and clear of human merit. Accepting the invitation to discipleship gives every Christian a purpose in this world—we are to help others come to know Jesus Christ as Savior. For those who fear sharing their faith with others, there is comfort in Jesus' promise that He will make us fishers of men. It is His promise; all we have to do is follow!

02.64. Regeneration and a Changed Life

GraceNotes - no. 64 by Dr. Charlie Bing Regeneration and a Changed Life The Bible mentions regeneration, or spiritual new birth, in several passages. Jesus talked about being "born again," or literally, born from above (John 3:3, John 3:7). In Titus 3:5, the apostle Paul uses a different word meaning born again usually translated "regeneration." The new birth is also mentioned or implied in other passages (John 1:13; 1 Peter 1:3, 1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18; 1 John 4:7; 1 John 5:1, 1 John 5:4, 1 John 5:18). The new birth that comes through faith in Jesus Christ is the implantation of divine life in a sin-dead soul. Some questions often posed about the new birth are: Does regeneration inevitably produce a changed life? Does a changed life therefore prove regeneration? Does a changed life give assurance of regeneration? Does regeneration inevitably produce a changed life?

We would have to conclude, Yes. There are many reasons to believe it does. Consider these: A believer in Christ as Savior is certainly inclined to trust Him in other areas of life. A believer has the instruction of God's Word which exhorts a changed life. A believer has Christ's life in him which will be manifested through him in some way. A believer has the Holy Spirit indwelling him to influence and transform him. A believer who understands God's grace is motivated to live gratefully and godly. A believer can experience God's discipline for disobedience.

Though our answer is yes, it is a cautious yes, because we have to admit it comes from inference based on the facts listed above. There is no statement in biblical texts on regeneration guaranteeing a changed life. Some might argue that 2 Corinthians 5:17 guarantees a changed life: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." But what is this verse teaching in context? Certainly "old things" couldn't refer to sin, because all Christians will sin, and likewise, "all things" that "become new" can't refer to one's conduct, because again, all Christians retain their personality, aptitudes, some habits, and even sins. The context is not speaking about changed conduct. The apostle Paul is telling the Corinthian church that he no longer views people "according to the flesh," or according to their human circumstances (such as whether they are Jew or Gentile) because his new relationship to Jesus Christ has radically changed his perspective (2 Corinthians 5:16). Paul reflects how he had previously dismissed Jesus as the Messiah because of His human circumstances (for example, His lowly birth, vulnerability, humiliating death), but now he has a new perspective on Him. Likewise, he wants the Corinthians to realize this new perspective that comes from their new reality of being reconciled to God and declared righteous in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). So the change spoken of is a change in the believer's standing before God and the resulting change of perspective toward the world and others.

Others will cite passages like James 2:14-26, Matthew 7:15-23, John 15:6, or some in 1 John, but these passages are not about proving one's salvation or regeneration. (For studies on these and other passages, see GraceNotes nos. 2, 13, 53, 54, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62.) Does a changed life prove regeneration?

Now this is a very different question, one that must be answered, No. Here is why: A changed life can result from reasons other than actual regeneration. A person's outward change does not guarantee inward conformity.

There is no objective standard for either the believer or the observer that specifies how much change is necessary to prove regeneration.

Life change is relative varying in degree and in rate for each person. A changed life can revert to looking unchanged. A believer may show no visible fruit or may persist in sin. To judge whether a life has truly changed would take nothing less than omniscience and constant surveillance of that person. With all these conditions, it is impossible to prove anyone is regenerate based on outward conduct or change. Does a changed life give assurance of salvation?

We can easily answer, No. Because of the reasons listed above, it is impossible to have assurance from an outwardly changed life or from one's behavior. Grace-based assurance does not come from works; it comes from faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 4:4; Romans 11:6, Ephesians 2:8-9). The best we can say is that a changed life may (or may not) be evidence of regeneration, but we cannot draw a certain conclusion. The only "proof" of salvation is one's faith in Jesus Christ (His person, provision, and promise). Of course, one's faith is only known with certainty by that person and by God. We are not assured of salvation by judging our works or conduct, but by trusting in Jesus Christ as our sufficiency for acceptance with God.

Conclusion

God gives divine life to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, which changes one's spiritual life and standing with God. We can conclude that it changes the believer's conduct as well, though there is no biblical text that explicitly says so. That conclusion has to be inferred from the totality of scriptural teaching. What is clearer is that outward conduct, or a "changed" life, cannot prove regeneration or give assurance of salvation. A changed life is not automatic, that is why we have the numerous exhortations in the New Testament. But a changed life is God's intention for us (Ephesians 2:10) and understanding His grace teaches us to live godly lives (Titus 2:11-12). Regeneration demands, intends, initiates, and provides for a changed life, but it does not guarantee a change visible to the believer or others and therefore is inadequate as a final proof of salvation. God's grace is our sufficient guarantee.

02.65. Revelation 3:20 and Asking Jesus into Your Heart

GraceNotes - no. 65 by Dr. Charlie Bing Revelation 3:20 and Asking Jesus into Your Heart

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Revelation 3:20

"I asked Jesus into my heart" is a common way Christians relate their salvation testimony. Preachers, teachers, witnessing Christians, and gospel literature frequently end their gospel presentation with the invitation to "Ask Jesus into your heart." When we look at the practical, theological, and biblical objections to this phrase, we may decide to use different language.

Practical Problems A woman related how as a child she was lying on her stomach in bed when her mother told her she needed to ask Jesus into her heart. She rolled over onto her back so that Jesus could come into her heart. This story illustrates how children think in concrete terms. It is easy to see how such an appeal can miss the gospel message altogether. Left with this imagery, we understand why assurance of salvation is a big problem with many children. They don't feel Jesus in their "hearts." Adults too are left with a subjective evaluation of whether they feel Jesus indwelling them. "Asking Jesus into you heart" easily breeds confusion and undermines the true basis of assurance, faith in God's promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Theological Problems

Most Roman Catholics would say they receive Jesus Christ into their hearts and lives when they eat the communion elements at church. But a physical transaction involving food, the digestive system, or the heart organ has nothing to do with receiving eternal life. Again, asking Jesus into the heart or receiving Him into one's life does not deal with the issue of one's sinful condition and Christ's provision for sin's penalty through His death and resurrection. A person is diverted away from the gospel message if "asking Jesus into your heart" is the condition for salvation.

Biblical Problems

Those who defend the invitation "Ask Jesus into your heart" usually cite Revelation 3:20. But as we interpret the passage in its context, we find that there is no basis for this invitation here. In the larger context, the book of Revelation was recorded by John to inform and prepare readers for the end times (Revelation 1:19). Within this general purpose, Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22 address contemporary churches and their respective situations. Six of the churches are displeasing to the Lord Jesus Christ and are told to repent. In contrast, the Gospel of John, which was written to tell readers how to have eternal life (John 20:31), never uses the word "repent" but uses "believe" almost one hundred times as the condition for salvation. This in itself is sufficient reason not to model our evangelistic invitation from the words of Revelation. When Revelation includes a clear invitation to salvation in Revelation 22:17, it echoes the invitations of the Gospel of John with "Come" and "take the water of life" (John 4:10; John 6:37, John 6:44, John 6:65).

We also observe that Revelation 3:20 is part of Christ's message to the church in Laodicea. Churches are composed of believers, but believers can be displeasing to the Lord by disobedient actions and sinful lifestyles (for example, the Corinthian church). The message to these and the other disobedient believers in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22 is not to get saved, but to repent of that which displeases the Lord. The Laodicean believers are not good or useful to Christ because they are like lukewarm water. He would prefer them to be like hot or cold water, because each has its respective useful purposes. Lukewarm water is useless, unpleasant, and thus spit out (Revelation 3:15-16). They think they need nothing in their relationship to God, but the Lord's assessment is very much to the contrary (Revelation 3:17). In Revelation 3:18 Jesus counsels them to buy gold, garments, and eye salve. This cannot speak of salvation because salvation is by grace without cost. Jesus speaks of paying the price for the things that are of spiritual value to the Christian. Further evidence that they are believers is the Lord's reassurance in Revelation 3:19 that He only reproves and chastens those He loves. The command to "be zealous and repent" is then illustrated by Revelation 3:20.

Revelation 3:20 shows how these believers can repent by responding to Jesus' invitation to renew fellowship with Him. Jesus has been excluded from the fellowship of the church, so He knocks seeking entrance. Since a church is made up of individuals, the invitation is to whoever in the church "hears" and "opens the door," a picture of receptivity. The promised result is that Jesus will come "in to" him. It is important to know the original language Jesus used. He did not say "into" to denote contact with (which would use the Greek *eis*), but he said "in to" to denote motion toward (using the Greek *pros*). The different emphases between the two prepositions can be seen in John 6:35 : "He who comes to (*pros*) Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in (*eis*) Me shall never thirst." Jesus will come in to where the receptive person is (not inside him) to eat together with him. The imagery of eating together is a common biblical and cultural picture of fellowship. The reward of sitting with Jesus on His throne is not a result of salvation, but a reward for the conquering or victorious Christian (Revelation 3:21).

Objections

Some will say, "But are we not supposed to ask Jesus for eternal life as indicated by John 4:10? Yes, for eternal life; but there is no biblical precedent for asking Jesus "to come into your heart." Ask is an analogy for believing. Others may also refer to John 1:12 to say we must receive Christ. But that verse uses receiving Christ for the result of salvation, not the means of salvation, which is to "believe in His name." Others might argue that many people get saved by asking Jesus into their heart. We would respond that if they were saved, it is because they also understood and believed the gospel. No one can be saved by only asking Jesus into his or her heart. We would also add that there are many people without assurance of salvation because they responded to this confusing invitation.

Conclusion When presenting the gospel, we should be as biblical and as clear as possible. We have an overwhelming biblical basis for telling people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who died for our sins, rose again, and guarantees our eternal salvation. There is no good reasons to use the confusing gospel-evading, and unbiblical invitation to "Ask Jesus into your heart."

02.66. Why Is Lordship Salvation So Popular?

GraceNotes - no. 66 by Dr. Charlie Bing Why Is Lordship Salvation So Popular? A question often asked by those who hold the Free Grace position is Why is Lordship Salvation so popular? The Free Grace position teaches salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, meaning that an unsaved person cannot do anything or make any commitment (such as submitting to Jesus as the Master of one's life) in order to be saved, and that believe means to be convinced or persuaded of the truth of the gospel. The Lordship view stands in opposition to the Free Grace position by teaching that an unsaved person must believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and submit to Him as Lord (or Master) of his life. They teach that believe includes submission, commitment, and obedience. Though specific biblical answers could be given (see past GraceNotes), here we simply state some reasons why Lordship Salvation is so popular.

Misinterpreted Scripture. Failure to distinguish between the passages in the Bible that pertain to salvation and those that pertain to the Christian life (or discipleship) lead many to a Lordship view. They confuse justification and sanctification issues, which makes the Lordship "gospel" include many conditions of commitment and obedience. Unfortunately, this adds human merit to the gospel. Preaching these texts as conditions for salvation may produce more outward commitment, but it also induces guilt and doubt.

Law verses Grace. Lordship theology often comes from confusing law and grace. Transferring the moral laws of the Mosaic Law to the age of grace after Jesus Christ has fulfilled the Law makes law-keeping an important part of salvation--if not at the front end as a condition for salvation, then at the back end as proof of salvation. Lordship adherents believe those who are truly saved will keep the moral laws of the Old and New Testaments demonstrating that Jesus is the Master of their lives. But this view not only ignores the change of dispensations between Law and grace, that is, the difference between God's program for Israel and His program for the church, it also ignores the reality that no one keeps all the laws perfectly.

New-old Calvinism. There has been a great resurgence of strong deterministic Calvinism, especially among young adults. Lordship theology is a necessary result of this theology, because in this view God elects some to salvation and gives them faith to believe. That divine gift of faith cannot fail, therefore it guarantees a persevering life of submission to Jesus as Lord if one is truly saved. This view of Christianity preaches the necessity of a full commitment to Jesus Christ, which is commendable in itself, but not if it is a test of salvation. The preaching of commitment attracts many young adults who respond to such challenges. Unfortunately, it is very likely that many or most of these "young, restless, and Reformed" Calvinists do not understand the whole package that makes commitment the condition for salvation. An Unrealistic View of Sin. An unwillingness to admit that Christians can sin severely or continuously leads many to a Lordship view, because they are not willing to concede that such people are saved since they have not made Jesus their Lord. While it is grievous when Christians sin, a more biblical approach is to recognize that this reality is reflected throughout the Bible. Grace gives people the freedom to serve God or their own

selfish desires. Unfortunately, not all choose to serve God, but the solution is not to make the gospel more difficult with additional conditions. Labeling these people as unsaved ignores or deals insufficiently with the Bible's teaching about God's discipline and the church's discipline for sinning Christians and their loss of temporal and eternal rewards. It is also possible they never really understood the simple gospel to begin with and are not saved. A Cure for Worldliness. A sincere and legitimate concern about the worldliness of modern Christians also causes many to adopt a Lordship position. They conclude that worldliness results from a gospel that makes salvation too "easy." They believe that if salvation is available only to those who are fully committed to the lordship of Christ, then godliness is guaranteed. To them, believe is not sufficient as the condition for salvation; it must be believe and submit or believe and commit. Unfortunately, this changes the condition of the gospel from faith alone to faith plus something the sinner must do.

Human Nature. Our natural human aversion to grace feeds the Lordship view. Since creation, humans have wanted to contribute to their salvation in their own way. This appeases the ego that craves significance, even if it is only the feeling that "I helped" or "I am fully committed," therefore I am saved. This appeals to the subtle sinful tendency of all humankind toward legalism - the self-inflating attitude that I can do something on my own to become acceptable to God. The prevalent legalism in almost all religious systems welcomes this Lordship theology.

Misleading Rhetoric. Lordship adherents have influenced many by their derogatory rhetoric and misrepresentation of Free Grace views. For example, the Free Grace position is sometimes called the "no-lordship" position even though its adherents believe that the lordship of Jesus Christ is essential to His provision of salvation and godly sanctification. The difference is that Free Grace adherents don't think commitment to Jesus as the Master of one's life is the issue in salvation. The issue is believing in Jesus as the One who died for one's sin, rose again, and guarantees eternal salvation. Commitment to Christ as Master is an issue of sanctification (that is, the Christian life or discipleship). Lordship adherents also make charges of "easy believism," which is misleading since no one says believing is easy. It is simple, but not necessarily easy. Another derogatory charge is that the Free Grace view is "antinomian" (lawless) and gives believers a license to sin. While Free Grace adherents do not believe Christians are under the Old Testament Law, they do recognize the New Testament commands with the understanding that these commands makes Christians Christlike, but they don't bring or prove salvation. The Free Grace position teaches that good works and holiness are God's desire for every Christian.

Hear-say. People tend to repeat the language and rhetoric passed on to them without evaluating it theologically or biblically. Sayings like "Receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior" and "If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all" have become part of popular Christian lingo. Usually, little thought goes into these phrases before they are used and repeated. Using such language does not confirm someone as Lordship, but is certainly pushes them that way.

Censorship. Frankly, those who hold a Lordship position, especially the Reformed Calvinists, have a lot of influence. That position dominates the publishing industry and academic institutions, and holds large conferences popular with young adults. As ugly as it sounds and is, that control purposely excludes the Free Grace perspective from the academic and popular forums, institutions, and publications, so Lordship Salvation flourishes. So-called "academic freedom" is not always so.

Conclusion

All these reasons can be reduced to one: Failure to comprehend the full riches of God's free gift of grace leads many Christians into Lordship Salvation. Their perspective implies that such grace is too good to be true, so it requires from a person either commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ to be saved, stay saved, or prove that one was ever saved. Free Grace, on the other hand, accepts the amazing and undeserved nature of God's saving grace and therefore teaches that eternal life can only be received through the response of faith apart from any merit on the sinner's part.

02.67. What is "Free Grace theology"?

GraceNotes - no. 67 by Dr. Charlie Bing What is "Free Grace theology"?

Theological labels are a convenient way to summarize belief systems. Many labels have become an established part of theological dialogue, like Arminianism, Calvinism, amillennialism, or premillennialism. Many who hear the label "Free Grace Theology" wonder what it means. Here is a brief summation.

1. Free Grace teaches that the grace of salvation is absolutely free. This is the obvious place to begin, though it should be unnecessary to say this since the word grace (Greek charis) essentially means a free and undeserved gift. However, since some speak of costly or cheap grace, it is necessary to clarify that grace is totally free. That does not mean it is free to the giver, who in this case is God, but it means that no payment or merit is required from those to whom it is offered, which would be all unsaved and undeserving sinners. Romans 3:24 distinguishes between the free gift to the recipient and the cost to the Giver: "having been justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

2. Free Grace means that the grace of salvation can be received only through faith. Since we as sinners can do nothing to earn God's grace, it has to be given as a gift which can only be received through faith. By faith (or believing, which is from the same Greek word) we mean the human response of accepting something as true and trustworthy. It is a conviction, an inner persuasion. This definition precludes any other conditions of works, performance, or merit (Romans 4:4-5). Faith cannot be defined by obedience to Christian commands, baptism, surrender, commitment of one's life to God, or turning from sins. These things can and should be the results of faith, but they are distinct from faith itself, otherwise grace ceases to be grace (Romans 11:6). Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, not by works . . ." Faith is a simple response, but that does not mean that it is an easy one. Many who hold to Free Grace believe that repentance, as a change of mind or heart, can sometimes be used to describe the aspect of faith in which we come to a conviction or persuasion about something. Other Free Grace proponents do not think repentance (as turning from sins) has any role in salvation or saving faith.

3. Free Grace believes the object of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith must always have an object, because faith itself is not the effective cause of our salvation (We are saved "by grace"), but the instrumental means through which we are saved ("through faith"). The One who actually saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is not any Jesus, it is Jesus as the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again and guarantees eternal salvation to all who believe in Him.

4. Free Grace holds to the finished work of Christ. Grace is free because Jesus Christ did all the work on our behalf. His proclamation "It is finished" on the cross means that He made the final and full payment for the penalty for our sins. It also means we cannot add anything to what Jesus accomplished. We cannot do anything to earn our salvation or to keep our salvation. Free Grace therefore teaches eternal security for the believer.

5. Free grace provides the only basis for assurance of salvation. Any system or belief that requires our performance cannot give assurance of salvation. Human performance is subjective, variable, unpredictable, and always imperfect. Faith must rest in Jesus Christ and His promise as revealed in the Word of God. The person and work of Christ and the Word of God are objective truths that cannot change. Therefore Free Grace offers the only basis for full assurance of salvation.

6. Free Grace distinguishes between salvation and discipleship. While some theological systems believe that all Christians are disciples, Free Grace understands that the condition for eternal salvation (believe) is distinct from the many conditions for discipleship (deny oneself, take up your cross, follow Christ, abide in His Word, love Christ more than your family, etc.). Since grace is absolutely free, it cannot demand these conditions or it ceases to be grace. Free Grace believes that the commitments of discipleship should be the result of salvation, not the requirement. To make them conditions of salvation inserts works and human merit into the gospel of grace.

7. Free Grace teaches that the Christian life is also by grace through faith. Since we are saved by grace and kept saved by grace, we also grow by grace which is accessed through faith. Grace provides everything we don't deserve and more for anything we need. Just as in salvation, the grace to grow is available to us through faith: "through whom [the Lord Jesus Christ] also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. . ." (Romans 5:2; compare Galatians 2:20).

8. Free Grace provides the best motivation for godly living. If salvation is by human performance, there is no assurance, and if there is no assurance, a motivation for good conduct easily becomes to prove we are saved or to avoid hell. Guilt, fear, and doubt can produce good conduct, but not necessarily godly conduct. Godly conduct includes the inner motivations of love and gratitude. The assurance of God's grace and the finished work of Christ allow Christians to grow in an environment of freedom and unconditional love (Titus 2:11-12).

9. Free Grace holds that the Christian is accountable. According to Free Grace, the believer is set free from any demands of the law or works as a basis for eternal salvation. But Free Grace also teaches that Christians should live godly lives because: 1) We should be grateful for what God has done (Romans 12:1-2); 2) God wants us to have good works (Ephesians 2:10); 3) We have a new position in Christ (Romans 6:1-14); 4) We have a new Master Jesus (Romans 6:15-23); and 5) We have a new power the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-11). Because of these things, Free Grace teaches that God will hold us accountable for the kind of lives we lead. God can discipline us in this life (Hebrews 12:5-11) and we will face the future Judgment Seat of Christ where believers will give an account to God (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-23, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10). In this judgment, believers will be rewarded or denied rewards. In no way does Free Grace teach that Christians can sin without consequence.

10. Free Grace is committed first to an accurate interpretation of the Bible. This should go without saying, but is necessary because many have forced their theological systems on their interpretations instead of letting the Bible speak for itself. The Free Grace system is the result of a literal and plain sense approach to the Bible that considers God's various ways of administering His plan for the world through the ages, and the proper contexts of any Bible passage. The Free Grace system seeks above all to be biblical. Its first commitment is not to a theological system, but to what the Bible says, even if some particulars cannot be reconciled easily to other teachings or traditional interpretations. Therefore, the Free Grace position allows for various interpretations of

some biblical passages as long as they are consistent with good principles of Bible interpretation and the clear teaching of God's free grace.

Conclusion

Free Grace theology begins with the plain and clear teaching of the Bible that grace is absolutely free. From this, the Bible's teachings about salvation, faith, security, assurance, the Christian life, and discipleship are viewed consistent with the unconditional nature of grace. The free grace of God should motivate Christians to worship, serve, and live godly for the "God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10) who "first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

02.68. Comparing the Two Coming Judgments

GraceNotes - no. 68 by Dr. Charlie Bing Comparing the Two Coming Judgments

Many Bible interpreters assume there is only one judgment at the end of the age, a judgment that separates believers from unbelievers. This causes major problems in harmonizing some Scriptures. For example, in John 5:24 Jesus says that anyone who believes in Him "shall not come into judgment," but in 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul says of believers, ". . . we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." If these speak of the same judgment, they would be in contradiction. How should we view these coming judgments?

Distinguishing between the two judgments

All people face a judgment (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible speaks of two great coming judgments (though we also recognize specific judgments for Jews and Gentiles who live in or through the Tribulation; e.g., Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:4-5). Both judgments involve people's works. The first is a final judgment of condemnation for only unbelievers. John 5:24 relates to those who believe in Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. They will not have to face the final judgment of Revelation 20:11-15, a judgment of unbelievers after Christ's return to earth as King. Works are mentioned there as evidence that their condemnation and suffering is deserved. The Bible also speaks clearly about a judgment facing only believers, called the Judgment Seat of Christ (Greek, bema). In this judgment, believers will not be judged for their faith in Christ as Savior, but for their faithfulness in following Christ as Lord. There, believers will have to give an account for how they used their lives. One's works determines whether one is rewarded or denied rewards.

These two judgments can be compared in this chart:

Which Judgment?	Great White Throne	Judgment Seat of Christ
Who is judged?	Only Unbelievers	Only believers
When is the judgment?	After the Millennium	After the Rapture and before the Marriage Supper of the Lamb
What is the witness?	Books and the Book of Life	Each person gives account

What is the role of works? Evidence for condemnation and degree of suffering Basis for rewards or denial of rewards

What is the final result? Eternal condemnation Rewards bestowed or withheld

What is the issue? Faith in Christ as Savior Faithfulness to Christ as Lord

What are the main Bible passages? Daniel 12:1-3; John 5:22-29; Revelation 20:11-15 Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:8 The difference it makes

If the two coming judgments are confused into one general judgment, then good works become necessary for salvation, because works play a role in both judgments. Of course, this would contradict clear statements of Scripture such as Romans 3:19-31, Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9, and Titus 3:5. It would be impossible to say that we are saved by grace as a free

gift from God. Works are mentioned in both judgments, but never as the basis or condition for salvation. This would also radically change the motivation for godly conduct. External good works would be sought as evidence of salvation, or conversely, the fear of insufficient works would leave many in doubt of their salvation and in fear of eternal condemnation. The focus on outward conduct can be deceptive and detract from true inner godliness. Living in doubt and fear about one's salvation is never a good basis for growing in grace.

Confusion of the two judgments would also undermine the accountability of Christians as a motivation for godly conduct. Believers who do not fear condemnation find the freedom to live their lives in light of their final evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Having their eternal salvation secure should motivate believers to serve God and live godly because of love and gratitude toward God. The fear factor is removed, as far as eternal salvation is concerned.

Conclusion The two great coming judgments are different for believers and unbelievers respectively. Those who have believed in Jesus Christ as Savior will not come under judgment for their salvation, but will escape condemnation. However, they will have to give an account for how they lived as Christians. Those who have rejected Jesus Christ as Savior face only a judgment of condemnation ending in the Lake of Fire. Appropriately, the Bible ends with both a reminder of rewards for believers, "And behold, I [Jesus] am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12), as well as an invitation to unbelievers: And the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely. (Revelation 22:17).

02.69. The Fate of Believers Seduced by False Teachers in 2 Peter 2:20-22

GraceNotes - no. 69 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Fate of Believers Seduced by False Teachers in 2 Peter 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

If we read 2 Peter 2:1-22, it is clear that the false prophets and teachers in view are doomed to eternal condemnation. But what about those deceived by them? Some read 2 Peter 2:20-22 and conclude that believers who follow false teaching lose their salvation or prove that they were never true believers to begin with. Both of those interpretations clash with the clear biblical teaching that faith in Jesus Christ is the sole condition for salvation, and that salvation cannot be lost. Observing the context helps us understand their fate.

Differentiating the groups

Clearly, the false prophets and false teachers mentioned at the beginning of 2 Peter 2:1-22 are unsaved and doomed to eternal destruction. The passage starts with a contrast between them and the "holy men of God" mentioned in the preceding passage ("But" in 2 Peter 2:1; cf. 2 Peter 1:21). The language describing their eternal doom is explicit and unequivocal (2 Peter 2:3-17; as also in the parallel description in Jude 1:4-16).

It appears there is a second group of people in this passage— those influenced by these false teachers to the point that they "follow their destructive ways" (2 Peter 2:22). These also appear to be unsaved, since they are in contrast to the saved readers, a third group addressed directly in 2 Peter 2:3 ("you"). The second group profess salvation which causes the Christian way to be blasphemed when they are seduced. As mentioned, the third group is the readers Peter is warning. He certainly addresses his epistle to believers only: They share the same "precious faith" and "righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1); God has given the readers all they need to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3); They "may be partakers of the divine nature" (Peter could be speaking about their present position or perhaps a future privilege earned by their righteous behavior—either way it assumes their salvation; 2 Peter 1:4); They have "escaped the corruption that is in the world" (2 Peter 1:4). After that affirming introduction, Peter exhorts the readers to add to their initial faith godly virtues (2 Peter 1:5-7) so that they will not be barren (or useless, from *argos*), unfruitful, shortsighted, or blind lest they forget (or neglect to appreciate) that they were cleansed from their sins (2 Peter 1:8-9).

These Christian readers need to be warned about the false teachers and their seduction of those not saved (2 Peter 2:2). After describing the doom of the false teachers and their unsaved

followers, Peter directs his attention to this third group in 2 Peter 2:18. The change in address is clear. After indicting the false teachers in every verse from 2 Peter 2:10-17, the indictments stop abruptly. In 2 Peter 2:18-19 Peter describes how the false teachers seduce gullible believers. The victims are described as "the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error." The present participle used here could be translated "are escaping" or "are barely escaping," but it is clear from the other two uses of this verb in 2 Peter (2 Peter 1:4, 2 Peter 2:20) that the escape is actual. The potential victims are contrasted with those unbelievers in 2 Peter 2:2 who do not escape the false teachers. The possibility of seduction When Peter speaks of the fate of the believing readers who could be influenced by the false teachers, he speaks in terms of possibility, not certainty. The "they" in 2 Peter 2:20 refers to those potential victims of 2 Peter 2:18-19. Nevertheless, it is a real warning about real consequences. As believers, they have "escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of The Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 2:20). The fact that they can be "again entangled" in the world's pollution means that they had once been, but had escaped (2 Peter 2:20). Peter's statement in 2 Peter 2:21 makes it clear that they had "known the way of righteousness," a reference to an intimate knowledge (epigin \square sk \square) of the Christian way. Their fate, described by the two contemporary proverbs cited in 2 Peter 2:22, requires that the dog had once left its vomit, and the pig was once washed. The consequences of seduction

So, we see a shift in Peter's address. He writes to this group of believers to warn them of the unsaved false teachers among them who will be destroyed and have led others to the same fate (2 Peter 2:1-17). Then in 2 Peter 2:18 he addresses the believers who are also coming under the influence of the false teachers. These believers face a terrible fate, but it is not specified as destruction or hell, only that their "latter end is worse for them than the beginning" (2 Peter 2:20). Whatever struggles or trials they endured as new Christians will fade in comparison to the trouble that awaits them (perhaps temporally, or at the Judgment Seat of Christ, or both). Peter says it would have been better if they had not known "the way of righteousness" than to turn from "the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Peter 2:21). Peter is not saying that it would be better if they had never been saved. He is saying that it would be better if they had not known the teaching about the life of righteousness implying that because they do, they have a greater responsibility to follow it. The text indicates that this life of righteousness is defined by living according to "the holy commandment delivered to them." What is this holy commandment? Apparently it is not related to any command to believe or be saved, as that would be an unusual and unprecedented way of referring to salvation. It is likely the command to be holy (1 Peter 1:15), a command to Christians.

Conclusion

It is naive to say that true Christians will not follow false doctrine. Like Peter, the other New Testament authors were not convinced of such a notion—see their epistles which contain many warnings to Christians about staying in the truth. Or, ask any pastor of tenure who has seen Christians come and go with the strangest of doctrines. It is especially sad to see and disconcerting to know that unless they repent of their error, there is a devastating fate that awaits them. It is best to avoid false teachers altogether and warn Christians about them. Not only is their doctrine false, but their motives are subversive to God's purposes.

02.70. Was Simon the Sorcerer Saved? Acts 8:17-24

GraceNotes - no. 70 by Dr. Charlie Bing Was Simon the Sorcerer Saved? Acts 8:17-24

Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." Can an individual recently saved from an occultic background commit a serious sin? Or would that horrendous blunder prove he was never really saved? The case in point is Simon Magus (magus is Latin for sorcerer) of whom the text says, "Then Simon himself also believed" (Acts 8:13), along with the other Samaritans who heard Philip preach the gospel. But later, when the apostles Peter and John arrive and bestow the Holy Spirit on the new believers, Simon tries to purchase this apostolic power (and so the origination of the word simony, which means to purchase influence or power in the church). Peter's reaction is swift and his words severe, cursing Simon and telling him to repent. Many have wondered, what is going on here?

Insight from the narrative

Bible authors, like Luke who wrote Acts, did not write stories randomly, but as part of a larger narrative. It is always necessary to note the nature and flow of events.

Acts 8:1-40 relates the transition of the gospel message from Jerusalem to Samaria. It comments on a good believer who was martyred, Stephen (Acts 8:2), and a bad unbeliever who persecuted the church, Saul (Acts 8:33), who later believes (Acts 9:1-43). After the story about Simon, the end of Acts 8:1-40 relates the story of an Ethiopian eunuch who believes Philip's preaching of Christ (Acts 8:26-40). The stories show that the reach of the gospel is comprehensive; it saves those who are hardened (Saul) as well as those who are open (Ethiopian). These stories also seem to emphasize the various effects that the gospel has on these different people. One accepts martyrdom (Stephen), one becomes an apostle (Saul/Paul), one tries to personally benefit (Simon), and one goes on his way rejoicing in his salvation (Ethiopian). If Simon is not saved, he would be the exception in the narrative. The evidence that Simon was not saved

Some believe that Simon does not show enough change of life if he was saved. Many have trouble accepting that a true believer would try to buy the apostles' unique power to bestow the Holy Spirit. They also think Peter's words are fit only for an unbeliever:

He curses Simon indicating he will perish (Acts 8:20).

He says Simon does not have any part in "this matter" (Acts 8:21).

He says Simon's heart is not right with God (Acts 8:21).

He tells Simon to repent of his wickedness to be forgiven (Acts 8:22).

He says Simon is poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity (Acts 8:23). The evidence that Simon was saved On the other hand, many think there is abundant evidence that Simon was a true believer.

Luke's words. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke says that the Samaritans believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12), that Simon "also believed" and was baptized (Acts 8:13), and that the Ethiopian Eunuch believed and was baptized (Acts 8:37-38). It would be arbitrary to deny Luke's affirmation of Simon's salvation while accepting his affirmation of the others' salvation. We would also assume that Philip was convinced that they had all believed and been saved before he baptized them (see Acts 8:37).

Peter's words. It is important to observe that Peter never says anything about Simon not believing or Simon rejecting Christ. He indicates that Simon will perish with his money (this should not be considered a prophecy, but a provisional rebuke). It would be odd for Peter to consign money to eternal hell if this is what he is referring to. The word "perish" (from *apoleia*) sometimes refers specifically to eternal destruction in hell, but it has the general meaning of ruin or waste (see Mark 14:4/Matthew 26:8; Acts 25:16; 2 Peter 3:16) and is used at least once in reference to a saved person (1 Corinthians 8:11). Certainly, Simon's misguided request shows such a perverted view of the apostolic position and the gift of the Holy Spirit that it would lead to his ruin or waste in this life. What Peter seems to be reacting to is Simon's sin of avarice born of jealousy for the unique apostolic power of bestowing the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:20). Thus when Peter says, "You have neither part nor portion in this matter" (Acts 8:21), the most obvious matter at hand is Simon's illegitimate desire for this apostolic privilege, not salvation. Then Peter says that Simon's heart is not right with God (Acts 8:21), which would be an odd way to describe an unbeliever. He tells Simon to repent of a specific sin, "of this your wickedness," and find God's forgiveness (Acts 8:22) again, an odd way to address an unbeliever who is condemned by sinfulness, not any one sin. Peter's take on Simon's problem is not that he is dead in sin or separated from God, but that he is "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity," both obvious references to his covetousness and avarice (Acts 8:23). Believers can succumb to bitterness and sin (Ephesians 4:32; Hebrews 12:15). Peter himself denied Christ as a new believer and later denied the gospel of grace by his actions (Luke 22:54-62; Galatians 2:11-14).

Simon's words. After hearing Peter's rebuke, Simon responds by asking the apostles to pray for him so that none of Peter's words would become reality. That is how the encounter ends. Simon does not ask for salvation, but repents of the specific sin that Peter addressed ("this your wickedness," Acts 8:22). This describes the response of a believer rather than someone who is initially believing in Christ for salvation.

Conclusion

After reviewing the testimonies of Luke, Peter, and Simon, the evidence seems to support the fact that Simon had believed in Jesus Christ like the other Samaritans, was saved and baptized like

them, but then sinned greatly. He was in danger of experiencing God's temporal curse for his specific sin of trying to purchase an apostolic power. His need was not to get saved, but to repent of that sin. He needed to see how he was terribly wrong and reject the error of his ways, which he seems to do. Christians can sin grievously, perhaps more so if they are new converts. But the grace that saves unbelievers freely, will also forgive believers abundantly.

02.71. Israel and God's Unrelenting Grace

GraceNotes - no. 71 by Dr. Charlie Bing Israel and God's Unrelenting Grace The story of Israel is the story of God's amazing grace. As God's favor bestowed unconditionally on undeserving sinners, no one should ignore the role of God's grace in any discussion of Israel. The biblical record of Israel presents God's unrelenting grace that pursued the prodigal nation in the past and persists into the future.

God's grace in Israel's past.

Israel's story begins with the unconditional gracious covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-20 and Genesis 15:1-21). He promised to make of Abraham a great nation and bless the whole world. The incipient nation finds its name, Israel, from Abraham's grandson, Jacob (Genesis 32:28), a deceiver who nevertheless inherited the land God promised. God used his son, Joseph, to deliver Jacob (Israel) from famine into Egypt (Genesis 46:1-34). In spite of the subsequent four hundred year enslavement in Egypt, God was faithful to His promise and delivered His people through Moses (Exodus 1:1-22, Exodus 2:1-25, Exodus 3:1-22, Exodus 4:31, Exodus 5:1-23, Exodus 6:1-30, Exodus 7:1-25, Exodus 8:1-32, Exodus 9:1-35, Exodus 10:1-29, Exodus 11:1-10, Exodus 12:1-51). God's grace gave birth to Israel and nurtured her through her infancy. As God prepared his people to enter their promised land, He constituted them into a nation by the Mosaic Covenant of Law (Exodus 19:1-25 ff.). Just before they entered the land, the king of Moab wanted to curse Israel through the prophet Balaam, but God would not allow it because of the covenant He made with Abraham (Numbers 22:1-41, Numbers 23:1-30, Numbers 24:1-25). While conquest of the land of Canaan came through obedience under Joshua, the nation did not obey completely (Judges 1:1-36, Judges 2:1-23), and by the time of the Judges, Israel had degenerated into a lawless divided people where "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Even so, God's grace preserved them by raising up judges to deliver His people from their enemies (Judges 2:16-19). During this time, the story of Ruth demonstrates God's unrelenting grace in preserving a faithful few and preparing a lineage that would result in the birth of the Messiah.

Even during the divine discipline of Israel's captivity to Assyria and Babylon, God preserved a faithful remnant according to grace (Romans 11:1-5). The biblical story of Esther shows how God protected His people in captivity from their enemies. But God did not allow Israel to remain in captivity. Under the Medo-Persians, He brought Israel back to their land to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem (Ezra, Nehemiah). In the time between the Old and New Testaments, God graciously preserved His people from the terrible Seleucid persecutions through the Maccabean rulers (1,2,3 Maccabees). Israel survived its darkest days by the grace of God.

One would think that the murder of their divine Messiah might seal the fate of Israel and push God beyond any limits of His grace, but Jesus Christ forgave His murderers from the cross (Luke 23:34) and promised to return and restore Israel (John 14:1; Acts 3:19-21). For crucifying the Messiah, God chastised His people in A.D. 70 by destroying Jerusalem and dispersing them among the nations of the world. After their stubborn rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God

judicially blinded Israel to the truth as He turned to the Gentiles (Acts 28:25-28) and allowed them to enjoy the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant by becoming sons of Abraham through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26-29, Galatians 4:1-7). In the new age of the church, Gentiles and Jews became one body in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-21, Ephesians 3:1-7). Though God instituted the church, He did not turn His back on the nation of Israel or replace Israel with the church (Romans 3:1-4; Romans 11:1-5). Any such conclusion comes from subjective and arbitrary interpretations of the promises that God made concerning Israel in the Old Testament and underestimates God's unlimited grace.

God's grace in Israel's present.

While some might have been tempted to think that the church replaced Israel because there was no nation from the time of Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 into the twentieth century, the reemergence of modern Israel should put to rest any such notions. In 1948, Israel was allotted their present-day territory, and in 1952 they were formally recognized as a nation. In a short time, this small oil-barren strip of mostly desert surrounded by large oil-rich hostile nations prospered by God's grace into one of the world's leading economic and military powers. Israel has survived relentless terroristic attack, bombings, and wars, yet she stands today as a testimony to God's unrelenting grace.

God's grace in Israel's future. The key to Israel's future lies in God's past promises to Abraham and His descendants. Israel has a future of blessing according to the same grace that founded and preserved her. This is amplified in the New Covenant as expounded in Jeremiah 31:1-40, Jeremiah 32:1-44, Jeremiah 33:1-26 and Ezekiel 36:1-38, Ezekiel 37:1-28. As a "new" covenant, it replaces the "old" Mosaic Covenant of Law. It does not replace the Abrahmic Covenant, but expands on its promise of blessings. According to the prophets, these blessings include the restoration of Israel as a nation (Jeremiah 31:35-40; Jeremiah 32:37-41; Ezekiel 36:22-38, Ezekiel 37:1-14), the forgiveness of sins, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and an intimate knowledge of God. The New Covenant is ultimately fulfilled when Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth. The apostle Paul testified to God's grace toward Israel when he explained the nation's sovereign election and preservation. Paul taught that God's grace toward Israel was not because they earned it; that's not the nature of grace: And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. (Romans 11:6)

All Israel will be once and for all restored and delivered from her enemies (Romans 11:26) simply because the "gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). God will do as He promised. Israel has a future--by God's unconditional, irreversible grace.

Conclusion and implications for Christians.

Someone has quipped "How odd of God to choose the Jews." Indeed! God's sovereign election of Israel was not because she deserved it. He chose Israel, because He chose Israel, and in doing so, He displayed to the world His wonderful grace against the backdrop of Israel's dark sinfulness.

God's unrelenting grace toward His people Israel is just as unrelenting toward His people in the church, both Jew and Gentile. The experience of Israel can picture the experience of the individual Christian (1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Hebrews 3:7-19, Hebrews 4:1-10). Christians today have the

same assurance of God's blessings because they have become sons of Abraham through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are covered by the very same grace.

While it is possible for Christians, like Israel, to be unfaithful to God, God will be faithful to Himself and His Word. He cannot deny Himself (Romans 3:4; 2 Timothy 2:13; Titus 1:2). Christians are secure in the same divine grace that out-measures their sins (Romans 5:20). This amazing and unrelenting grace should lead Christians to offer themselves to God as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2) and to offer praise to Him (Hebrews 13:15-16). God will never give up on His people. Ever.

02.72. Free Grace and Views of Election

GraceNotes - no. 72 by Dr. Charlie Bing Free Grace and Views of Election The doctrine of election always provokes a lively discussion among Christians who have a variety of ways to explain it. There is no uniform agreement about election within the Free Grace position. Essentially, what is debated is how God's sovereign will coalesces with man's free agency (or his response). The word election means to be chosen or selected and is often associated with other theological words like predestination and foreknowledge. In brief summary, here are the basic views of election most frequently encountered, though every view has its own variations.

1. Monergistic, unconditional, pre-temporal election. This view holds that a person's salvation is by God's sovereign decree in eternity past before creation or before anyone believes. It in no way depends on man's own agency, will, or faith. The grace of salvation cannot be resisted and the gift of divine faith necessarily results in a life of faithfulness and good works that perseveres to the end of life. God is the only one who acts, thus the term monergistic. This view is sometimes called Dortian Calvinism, High Calvinism, or Reformed Calvinism identified by the TULIP acronym. Opponents of this view claim it makes God inconsistent with His other attributes like love and actually dehumanizes man by taking away his free agency, which diminishes God's glory because the gospel is not offered to all and the elect cannot refuse it. This view is not popular with Free Grace proponents.

2. Synergistic, pre-temporal election. Some who call themselves moderate Calvinists recognize God's election in eternity past or before one believes, but also recognize the necessity of man's faith to actualize that salvation. God's will and man's response are working together, compatible, or synergistic. Since the Bible affirms both God's will and man's agency in salvation, they are congruent, or work in harmony. Some who believe this prefer to view man's will working within God's greater sovereign will. How God's will and man's will work together cannot easily be understood or explained. TULIP Calvinists object that man has no freedom to respond to the gospel and consider such a view of faith as a human work. This moderate Calvinism is held by some Free Grace followers.

3. Pre-temporal, conditional election. God knows who will eventually believe in Jesus Christ and elects them to salvation. God's foreknowledge is understood as the ability to know the future, but has no determining quality. Since God elects those He knows will respond to the gospel, election is conditioned on man's response. This foresight election is the traditional Arminian position. Some object that this view makes election totally meaningless since it is all conditioned on man's response. Some in the Free Grace position have adopted the basics of this view while rejecting other Arminian tenets.

4. Pre-temporal, corporate election. While all the other views listed here treat election as directed towards individuals, this view sees election in relation to Christ and the church. In eternity past, God elected His Son, Jesus Christ. All who believe are placed in that elect group "in Christ," the church. An individual's salvation is not necessarily foreseen. This view was popularized by

theologian Karl Barth, but in his view all men were elect in Christ-some did not yet know it. Some object that this view ignores some Scriptures that describe election as applied to individuals and also reject the universalism it allows. Some Free Grace proponents are comfortable with the idea of corporate election but reject other aspects of this view, like universalism.

5. Pre-temporal, middle-knowledge election. Also known as Molinism, this view holds that God in eternity past chose to create, from all the possible scenarios, the one that brought about His desired results (sovereignty) using truly free moral decisions (free will). Knowing exhaustively what people could do, would do, and thus will do in any scenario, God created the best scenario and knows who will believe in Christ. Some would argue that this does not answer the question of why God chose any scenario that allows some to reject Him, yet others who hold the Free Grace position think this view best reconciles God's sovereign will with man's free agency.

6. Atemporal, qualitative election. This view does not see the word election referring to individual salvation, but to God's description of believers as "choice." Those who believe in Christ are those who value His Son and who will glorify God in their lives and service, thus they are designated qualitatively as choice people. The Bible never speaks of election for salvation, but election for service. Some object that this view takes unwarranted liberty in its definition of election and some of the passages where it is found. In recent times, this view has been espoused by some of the Free Grace persuasion.

7. Trans-temporal, congruent election. While election is usually viewed in a linear time-delineated way, it should be viewed through God's nature that encompasses and goes beyond all time. Though the Bible describes salvation as something decreed by God in the "past" but also presents it as a possibility in the "present," there is no contradiction because God is trans-temporal, that is, He encompasses the past, present, and future. God exists in one "eternal now," so His experience of man and his salvation (or condemnation) is complete and thus congruent in terms of divine will and human agency. What God knows He determines and what He determines He knows. God's will for an individual's salvation is in the past as much as in the present or the future, though man's response is confined to his present time on earth. Opponents might say that this view dismisses the meaning of time language in the Scriptures, but some in the Free Grace position find it a good option.

Evaluating these views The view with the most credibility is the one that harmonizes the most Scriptures. Some of the more crucial questions that should be answered are:

Though each view has a theological bias, which one can be supported best from the Scriptures themselves? (This brief study could not begin to answer this!) Which view is most consistent with a biblical view of God and all of His attributes? Which view is most consistent with a biblical view of man created in the image of God and affected by the fall?

Those of a Free Grace persuasion would especially want to know: which view is most consistent with the biblical view of grace as unconditional, faith as a legitimate human response, and salvation by grace through faith apart from human merit or works either at the front end of salvation or the back end?

Conclusion

Christians should understand that the debate about God's predestining will and man's free agency existed before Christianity in ancient Judaism, Greek philosophy, and many other religions. That should help us see that the issue will not be resolved quickly, much less to everyone's agreement. It is legitimate to ask whether it is even possible to explain everything about God, or whether some things are beyond our ability to fully understand and explain. And if we could explain everything about God, what kind of God would He be? We should study the doctrine of election and form opinions, but all with a great deal of humility and from an honest treatment of the Scriptures. If so, there will be no conflict with the gospel of salvation by free grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

02.73. Does Free Grace Theology Lead to False Assurance?

GraceNotes - no. 73 by Dr. Charlie Bing Does Free Grace Theology Lead to False Assurance?

Free Grace theology teaches that those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died on the cross for their sins, rose from the dead, and guarantees eternal salvation are saved. These who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior can know for sure that they are saved. But some object that it is not that simple or easy. They say the Free Grace view gives people false and damning assurance on the basis of their profession of faith. After all, they may not have believed with all their heart, turned from all their sins (in their of repentance), or done enough good works.

Some theologies cannot give full assurance. The Free Grace perspective is unique because it emphasizes on God's free, unconditional grace in salvation. We are saved by what God has done, which means all we must do is believe—there is nothing else we can do.

Other theological perspectives require some aspect of human performance before a person who professes faith in Christ can be sure that they are saved. Even then, their assurance is not absolutely full or certain. Three leading theologies fail to give the believer full assurance.

Reformed Calvinism teaches that since God must give the elect the faith to believe and regenerate them before they can believe, that divine faith guarantees deep repentance (turning from sins), a changed life (evident good works), and perseverance in faithfulness until the end of their lives. Professing believers can have assurance only to the extent that they exhibit these things to the satisfaction of their own subjective judgment.

Arminianism teaches that those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior have the freedom of will to reject Christ and lose salvation or can lose salvation because of sin. Therefore, those who believe can only have a present assurance of present salvation, but not a present assurance of future salvation.

Lordship Salvation believes that to be saved, people must surrender and commit their lives to Jesus Christ as their Master. This view is found among both Calvinists and Arminians. Since Christians are those who are submitted to Christ, their lives will show it by turning from sins, doing good works, and continuing in obedience to Christ. Anyone who is living in this way can have a measure of assurance, but not absolute assurance, because the future is unknown. So while the Reformed Calvinist believes that once they are saved, they are always saved, they cannot be sure they were once saved. The Arminian believes that they are presently saved, but cannot be sure that they will remain saved. Lordship Salvation adherents claim a tentative assurance. Only the Free Grace position allows full assurance based on salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Know what saves us

We are saved by what God has done for us by providing Jesus Christ as our Savior. Salvation is by grace, a gift of God. It does not depend on our performance. We must believe in Christ, but it is

not faith that saves us—Jesus saves us. Faith is how we appropriate the promise of eternal salvation. Turning from sins, submitting to Christ as Master, and doing good works cannot save us if we do not believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. Our assurance comes from trusting what God has done for us, not what we do.

Those who are taught that they can have assurance by looking at their faith can be deceived, because they can have great faith in some facts about Jesus Christ, but not believe in Him and His promise of eternal life. They can turn from sins, be surrendered to Christ, and serve Him as Master, but not believe in Him as Savior (cf. Matthew 7:21-23). Ironically, these performance-based systems of assurance can give a dangerous false assurance of salvation, something that the Free Grace viewpoint is accused of.

Know what assures us

It is true that those who hold to the Free Grace perspective can give someone a false sense of assurance if they counsel someone who does not understand the gospel and is not saved. But if someone reflects a clear understanding of the gospel and trusts in Jesus Christ as their Savior, then it is reasonable and practical to help that person know that they are saved. God wants us to know that we are saved (cf. 1 John 5:11-13). The New Testament authors knew that they and their readers were saved, even though many readers were not living godly lives (e.g., the Corinthians; see 1 Corinthians 6:11).

We are assured of our salvation by the testimony of God and Jesus Christ through the Scriptures. Whoever believes in Christ has everlasting life, will not come under judgment for their sins, and has passed from death to life (John 3:16, John 3:36; John 5:24, John 6:47). These things are certain and final. We are assured by God's promise of grace, because grace guarantees that the security of our salvation is up to God, not us (Romans 4:16). The very nature of faith also assures us. Faith is being convinced and sure of something (Hebrews 11:1). Since the Bible says that whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life, the assumption is that we can know when we believe something. We know that we are saved in the same way we know that we believe $2 + 2 = 4$ or we know that we believe Jesus is God.

Some use a three-legged stool to illustrate how we can know we are saved. One leg is the testimony of God's Word, another is our good works, and the third is the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. But the testimony of God's Word alone is sufficient assurance. If His Word says that we are saved, then our works or our perception of the Holy Spirit within us are only secondary corroborating evidences. The subjective evaluation of our works and the Spirit's inner testimony are imperfect and can change, but God's Word never changes.

Know what is at stake

If we have full assurance of salvation, we can live at peace and confidence that God has accepted us. That secure foundation gives us a strong motivation to grow in our relationship with God. We can live confidently, die confidently, love confidently, and share the gospel confidently with others. This is not presumption or false assurance; it is as true as God's Word.

Those who look within to judge whether they have believed in the right way, repented in the right way, or committed themselves to God enough can never be absolutely sure of their salvation.

They lose peace, confidence, security, and a foundation for a healthy relationship with God. They are subject to doubts, unhealthy guilt, and the burden of legalism (trying to find acceptance with God by what we do).

Conclusion

Any theological system that requires us to look at the quality of our faith or performance cannot give full assurance of salvation. The Free Grace view, because it is the biblical view, offers full assurance based on the objective truth of what God says about who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He promises. Those who take their focus off of these objective facts and subjectively focus on themselves will not find full assurance. Faith, repentance, commitment, and perseverance are not our Savior; Jesus Christ is our Savior!

02.74. The Doctrine of Justification

GraceNotes - no. 74 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Doctrine of Justification The doctrine of justification has a central role in church history and in distinguishing biblical Christianity from all other religions. A discussion about the gospel and its salvation must address the meaning and significance of this doctrine. An incorrect understanding of justification can corrupt the gospel, undermine the foundation of the Christian life, and make assurance of salvation impossible. A biblical definition

Though not apparent in the English language, the Greek shows the relationship between the ideas of justification and righteousness. The Greek word for justification is *dikaiosis*, righteous is *dikaios*, righteousness is *dikaiosis*, the verb justify is *dikaioo*, and justification is *dikaiosis*. When not used for eternal salvation, the Bible sometimes uses justified or justification to mean vindicated, right, or righteous before others (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:29, Luke 7:35, Luke 10:29, Luke 16:15, Romans 3:4, Romans 4:2, James 2:21, James 2:24 will be discussed below). When used for eternal salvation, justification refers to being vindicated before God such that we have a new legal standing with Him because He declares that we are no longer guilty as sinners. Not only is guilt and its condemnation removed, but God's righteousness is imputed (credited, assigned) to us. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (cf. Romans 5:15-19). Of course, this verse is not saying that Christ actually became sinful, but our sins were imputed to Him. In justification, we do not become internally righteous, but have Christ's righteousness imputed to us or credited to our account before God (Romans 4:3-4, Romans 4:6, Romans 4:8-11, Romans 4:22-24). Justification happens in an instant and results in the basis, power, and motivation to grow in practical righteousness, which is called progressive sanctification. To summarize, justification is God's legal act by which an unrighteous sinner who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior is declared righteous before God, because Christ's righteousness is imputed to him. A legal definition The concept and language of justification is from the courtroom. As Judge, God declares that the sinner is now legally acceptable because divine justice has been satisfied by Jesus Christ. This verdict does not make the sinner become righteous any more than a judge's verdict of "guilty" makes a person become evil. God declares a sinner righteous in legal standing, though he remains unrighteous experientially (compare Luke 7:29 where God is declared righteous — He is not made righteous!).

There are both negative and positive aspects to justification. Negatively, judgment for our sins is cancelled so that we no longer face condemnation (Romans 8:33-34). Positively, we gain a new righteous standing before God and are forgiven (Romans 4:6-8). God views us as righteous by virtue of having Christ's righteousness imputed to us (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30; Php 3:9).

How we can be justified As sinners, we can be justified only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 3:24 a says, "having been justified freely by His grace..." God's free gift of grace excludes human works or merit (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9). Then Romans 3:24 b explains what makes justification free: "...through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The word redemption speaks

of the price that was paid when Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. So the basis for our justification is God's gracious gift of His Son for our sins. We obtain this grace "through faith in Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:22; cf. Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8). That faith is our conviction that what God has said about our eternal salvation through Christ as Savior is true.

It accepts God's promise of eternal salvation. The Bible clearly teaches that we cannot be saved by works or human merit (Romans 3:28; Romans 4:5, Galatians 2:16).

James 2:21-24 is often used to argue that Abraham was justified before God by works not just faith. But this is not speaking of forensic justification before God. Abraham was justified before men when he offered up Isaac. He was justified before God through faith (Genesis 15:6) long before he offered Isaac (Genesis 22:1-24).

Unbiblical views of justification Not all accept this biblical understanding of justification. Roman Catholicism teaches that justification is an initial infusion of God's righteousness at baptism that grows in a person to make him righteous. A person cannot know in this life if he is fully justified, because it is not a legal pronouncement, but a reward earned by good works and hopefully bestowed at death. In departure from Roman Catholicism, Reformation doctrine traditionally taught that justification is an instantaneous declaration of forensic (legal) righteousness before God. However, some Reformed theologians now propose a two-part justification: Initial justification when God declares someone righteous based on faith in Christ as Savior, and final or future justification when God judges whether that person's works validate their initial justification. Without the latter, there is no eternal salvation.

Another recent view of justification popularized by Norman Tom ("N. T.") Wright proposes that justification is not a legal declaration or imputation of God's righteousness, but God's declaration that one is accepted into the covenant family of Abraham, viewed as the church. Faith evidenced by works proves that one is already a member of that community and therefore God declares him "justified."

There are many problems with these aberrant views. Foremost is the diminution of Christ's work on the cross. If final justification involves works in any way, then Christ did not do enough to pay for our sins. These views also blatantly contradict the Bible passages that say we cannot be saved by works, whether they are added to the front end or the back end of salvation. In addition, the Bible clearly shows that when we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior for eternal life, we have that life. We will not be condemned or die eternally (John 3:16; John 5:24, John 6:35, John 6:47, John 11:26). Finally, these views contradict the biblical affirmations of a final and instantaneous justification when we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior (cf. Romans 5:1; 1 Corinthians 6:11).

Why a correct understanding of justification is important

There are many reasons why a correct view of justification is central to biblical Christianity. First, it maintains a clear gospel of grace without the addition of works at any time. Second, it helps us understand our new position before God as a basis and motivation for growing in godliness (sanctification). Third, it gives the believer in Christ assurance of salvation based on the sure promise of God that those who believe are justified and possess eternal life (Romans 5:1). Fourth, the believer need never fear condemnation (Romans 8:33-34). Fifth, it helps us understand the distinction between justification and sanctification, which is so often confused when interpreting

Bible texts.

Conclusion

Justification by grace through faith separates biblical Christianity from every other religion. It separated Protestants from Roman Catholics in the Reformation. If it is surrendered, the Christian religion becomes like every other performance-based religion of the world. It is a doctrine important enough to understand, teach, defend, and celebrate.

02.75. How God Draws People to Salvation

GraceNotes - no. 75 by Dr. Charlie Bing How God Draws People to Salvation

John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." This verse points to God's sovereign work that brings people to Jesus Christ, and from the context of ;John 6:1-71, they evidently believe in Him for eternal salvation. Some think this verse teaches that God draws people in such a way that they cannot resist. They understand the word draw to mean drag. But would God force His salvation on people against their will? Is God's grace irresistible? The passage, its context, and other Scriptures help us understand that God draws people to faith in Christ in a number of ways.

God uses man's ability to respond. This does not diminish God's sovereignty, but recognizes that He has sovereignly designed man to have free will which allows him to respond to God (for a related discussion on election see GraceNotes no. 72). Since the Bible teaches that man does not seek God on his own (Romans 3:11), God must take the initiative. He reveals Himself in creation, and though man knows this, he still refuses to honor God (Romans 1:19-21). So God, in His love, seeks us out (Luke 19:10; John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10). But how should we understand the word draw as it is used in John 6:44? The range of meaning for the word *elkuo* includes to draw, pull, or attract. It is found five times in the New Testament, four of those in John. Though the literal uses in John and Acts clearly mean drag or pull (John 18:10; John 21:6; Acts 16:19) the two figurative uses in John 6:44 and John 12:32 are better understood as attract. The context shows why. In John 6:1-71, eternal life is spoken of as a gift that is received by believing in Christ (John 6:27-29, John 6:32-35, John 6:40, John 6:47, John 6:51). The idea of a gift assumes the freedom to accept or reject it. The motive behind this gift assumes God's love (John 3:16). This is consistent with how the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) sometimes uses *elkuo* in a context of love's attraction: "With loving kindness I have drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3; see also Song of Solomon 1:3-4). In other ancient Greek literature, this verb is used to describe a mother drawn by love to her sons (4 Maccabees 14:13; 15:11). The idea of God forcing someone irresistibly is contrary to His loving nature and manner. No man getting married wants to force his partner to the altar, but rather woos and loves her to come willingly. So also God does not force people in a direction they are not already inclined to take. His drawing in John 6:44 is in the context of those who willingly believe (John 6:40, John 6:47, John 6:65). God's will does not preclude man's will and freedom to respond, but includes it. If man does not have this freedom, then why does God judicially blind the Jews or use parabolic language to hide His truth? It would be like putting a blindfold on a corpse.

God uses Jesus' work on the cross. Jesus explained his role in drawing people to Himself for salvation: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. This He said, signifying what death He would die"(John 12:32-33). The word "peoples" is not in the original Greek, but is supplied in the English translation. "All" could speak of the extent of Christ's work providing for all people, both Jew and Gentile. Or it could it could speak of all people realizing that

while all are drawn to some extent, some will resist and refuse to believe. Either way, this is not speaking of compulsion, but of a moral pull on the inner person. The cross is proof of God's love, our sin, His righteousness, and the coming judgment (John 16:8-11). A similar reference to Christ being lifted up in John 3:14-15 refers to the story in Numbers 21:4-9 when those who looked at the bronze serpent on the pole were healed. In both passages, the provision of salvation is available to whoever believes.

God uses the Word to teach. The teaching of God's Word is designed to draw people to Christ. Following John 6:44, John 6:45-46 say, "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." The quotation from Isaiah 54:13 is in the context of God wooing Israel back to Himself as a woman or wife is wooed (Isaiah 54:6). The process is that God teaches, people hear and learn, then people respond by coming to Christ for salvation (In John, the phrase "come to" Christ obviously refers to coming to him in faith for salvation; cf. John 5:40; John 6:35, John 6:37, John 6:65, John 7:37). Only those who have listened and learned believe. A receptive attitude towards God's Word is always rewarded with more truth (Mark 4:24-25). Many, however, will reject the truth about Christ just as many rejected Moses' teaching (John 5:45-47; cf. Luke 16:27-31) and just as the crowd did in John 6:1-71 in spite of seeing a great miracle and hearing the greatest Teacher. We also know that Judas Iscariot was constantly taught by Jesus, yet evidently never believed (John 6:64). Today, the Gospel is the power of God to salvation (Romans 1:16). As we teach and preach it, it draws to Christ those who listen and learn from it.

God uses the Holy Spirit to convict. According to John 1:1-11, the Holy Spirit convicts of truth (elegcho can also be understood as exposes or convinces): "And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." As Christ draws all men through His work on the cross, the Spirit exposes to all and convinces all ("the world") of that truth as the Word of God is taught. The Spirit uses divine persuasion to convince, reprove, disturb, draw, and love a person. But that does not guarantee that all who are convinced of the truth will receive it. A person can understand the truth, yet reject it (John 5:39-40). But whoever responds positively and seeks God will be rewarded (Hebrews 11:6).

God uses people as instruments. God has chosen to use people as agents for teaching the Word of God which the Holy Spirit uses to convict the world. In addition to His work on the cross, Jesus also taught the gospel. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian church that the first thing he made known to them was the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3). He reasons with the Romans "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14).

God draws people to Christ using these various means in collusion; they are not in conflict with one another. Before Jesus speaks of the Father's drawing in John 6:44, He twice says the Father gives people to Him (John 6:37, John 6:39). The context suggests that the Father gives people to Christ so that they will be secure--in John 6:37 Christ will never cast them out, and in John 6:39 Christ will not lose any but guarantees their resurrection. In John 6:40 and John 6:44 He also guarantees their resurrection. But before that day, John 6:40 explains that the Father has given people to Christ that they may "see the Son" and believe in Him for everlasting life. So here we have the collusion of God's sovereign work directing people to Jesus so that they will believe in

Him for salvation. A good example of God drawing someone with various means is the story about Lydia in Acts 16:13-15. Lydia goes to a prayer meeting (Is she drawn by her own initiative or God's –or both together?) and hears Paul teach (the gospel). We read, "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). God worked, Paul taught the gospel, the Spirit convinced, and Lydia responded by believing and so was baptized.

Conclusion

God does not force His salvation on anyone. He uses various means to draw people to respond with faith in Jesus Christ. If people have to be dragged to salvation because they have no ability to believe, how could anyone be held responsible for not believing? Their condemnation would be God's fault, not their own. Ultimately, our seeking after God is our response to Him seeking us. We should therefore preach the gospel of God's gracious gift of eternal life relying on the Holy Spirit to convince people of its truth and draw them to Christ.

02.76. The Reality of Carnal Christians

GraceNotes - no. 76 by Dr. Charlie Bing The Reality of Carnal Christians Is there such a thing as carnal Christians, believers who persist in disobedience to God? Some say no. While conceding that Christians can and do sin, they deny that true believers will persist in sin until the end of their physical lives. They believe that God's work of salvation in a person guarantees perseverance in good works and obedience (see Grace Notes no. 49). Others who believe in the reality of carnal Christians are accused of giving unbelievers false assurance of salvation (though these accusers could also give false assurance if one's performance is the measure of salvation). Those who believe in the reality of carnal Christians are also accused of promoting license toward sin (though their accusers usually agree that they do not purposely promote sin). The word "carnal" (sarkikos, belonging to the realm of sinful flesh) is used here to denote persistent sinful behavior. What then does the Bible say about carnality and Christians? The reality of differences in Christian experience No two believers have identical experiences of Christian maturity and holiness. There are many things that can influence a Christian's experience, such as age at salvation, exposure and receptivity to truth, past experience, personality, the world system, the flesh, and the devil. We see these different experiences in Scripture.

Matthew 5:19 – Some are called "least in the kingdom of heaven" because they sin and cause others to sin, while others are called "great in the kingdom of heaven."

Luke 8:11-15 – Some who believe do not grow because of the distractions of worldly temptations and pleasures (see GraceNotes no. 57).

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 – Paul affirms the Corinthians' salvation (1 Corinthians 1:2-9, 1 Corinthians 4:15, 1 Corinthians 6:11), but calls them "carnal" and "babes in Christ." They are in contrast to those called "spiritual" in 1 Corinthians 2:15.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 – Some believers will have their good works rewarded and some their useless works burned at the end of their lives.

2 Timothy 2:20-21 – There are two kinds of vessels in God's house, some that bring honor and some that bring dishonor.

Hebrews 5:11-14 – The readers, though definitely saved (see GraceNotes no. 15), are rebuked for being "dull of hearing" and "unskilled in the word of righteousness." They are like babies who can only eat milk, unlike mature believers who can eat the meat of the Word. In the Bible and real life there is not a one-type-fits-all Christian experience, but a spectrum of growth, maturity, and obedience. At the low end of this spectrum are those who live carnally. The reality of persistent sin in Christians A simple reading of the Scriptures demonstrates that Christians can struggle persistently with sin.

Romans 7:7-25, Romans 8:1-17 – The apostle Paul describes his own experience of struggling with his sinful flesh and concludes that victory comes from the Holy Spirit's control. The

Corinthians – This whole church is living in sin (pride, divisiveness, sexual immorality, lawsuits, etc.) though they are surely saved (1 Corinthians 1:2-9; 1 Corinthians 4:15, 1 Corinthians 6:11). Four years after Paul visited them, he writes to confront and correct their on-going sins. The Galatians – This church is turning away from the true gospel of grace to a false gospel of legalism. Though saved (Galatians 1:1, Galatians 1:3, Galatians 1:6), they are in danger of experiencing God's curse (Galatians 1:8-9) and losing the benefits of grace (Galatians 5:4).

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 – Some in the church were disorderly, lazy, and in need of admonishment.

1 John 1:8, 1 John 1:10 – Christians who deny the reality of sin in themselves walk in darkness, make God a liar, and thus deny the need to practice confession (see GraceNotes nos. 37, 58). In short, the fact that the Bible has exhortations against sin, warnings of consequences for sin, instructions for church discipline, and admonitions for confession and restoration is meaningless if persistent sin is not a possibility and a reality for Christians. The reality of sinning believers Only one example of a believer persisting in sin until the end of life proves the reality of saved people who live carnally. Nevertheless, here are some of the many examples.

Saul – Though anointed by God and though he prophesied (1 Samuel 10:1-13, 1 Samuel 10:24) and exiled mediums and spiritists from Israel (1 Samuel 28:3), Saul died in sin (1 Chronicles 10:13-14). The kings of Israel and Judah – Some like Asa (2 Chronicles 14:1-15, 2 Chronicles 1:1-19, 2 Chronicles 16:1-14), Jehu (2 Kings 9:1-37, 2 Kings 10:1-36), Joash (2 Kings 12:2; 2 Chronicles 24:1-27), Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1-20; 2 Chronicles 25:1-28), and Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:1-23) were commended for aspects of their faith and obedience, yet died in disobedience.

Solomon – This king of Israel and author of Scripture defected from God and worshipped idols in his old age. The Bible record does not indicate he repented before he died (1 Kings 11:1-43).

Ezekiel 18:24 – A righteous man who sins seriously will die physically because of his sin.

Ananias and Sapphira – These members of the early church died because they lied (Acts 5:1-10). The Corinthian believers at the Lord's Supper – Because they took the Lord's Supper in an unworthy way, some died (1 Corinthians 11:30; "sleep" is a euphemism for physical death).

These biblical examples may remind us of present-day situations we observe among Christians. The reality of consequences for sinful Christians The Scriptures recognize the reality of sin in believers, but do not excuse it. Sinning believers are held accountable for their behavior.

Divine discipline – God chastens those He loves who need correction (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Church discipline – Churches are instructed to discipline and restore sinning believers (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

Temporal discipline – Sinning and selfish believers can lose blessings and fullness of life (Psalms 32:3-5, Psalms 51:1-12; Matthew 16:24-26).

Lost rewards – Sinning believers can lose rewards in this life and at the Judgment Seat of Christ at the end of life (Matthew 6:1; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 1 Corinthians 13:3; James 2:12-13; 2 John 1:8).

Loss of usefulness – Christians who do not progress in sanctification should not be teachers (Hebrews 5:11-13) and can be useless in God's service (John 15:1-6; 2 Tim. 20-21).

Loss of fellowship – Believers who live in sin walk in darkness and forfeit fellowship with God and with other believers (1 John 1:3-7).

Physical death – Christians can commit sin that persists unto death (1 Corinthians 5:4-5; James 5:19-20; 1 John 5:16).

These consequences, the process of discipline, and restoration are meaningless if those sinning are unbelievers. We see no exhortations to get these sinners saved.

Conclusion A single example of a believer who dies in a sinful condition proves the reality of carnal Christians. Yet the Bible has many examples along with teaching about how God exhorts, warns, and disciplines those who persist in sin. To deny the reality of carnal Christians ignores overwhelming biblical evidence in favor of a false theological construct that teaches salvation is obtained and proved by submission to God's will and that faith is a gift from God that cannot finally fail. This view cannot offer full assurance of salvation because it depends on one's performance until the last day of life, and no one can predict the future. Neither does it specify how long a person can sin without being called carnal. We wonder how such teachers deal with the reality of sin in their own lives and how they can finally judge another's salvation. Only God can Judge. The Bible, our observations of Christians, and self-examination show the continuing reality of the Christian's struggle with sin. We have the comfort of God's abundant grace in Romans 5:20 for good reason: "...But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." No amount of sin can exhaust the amazing grace of God.

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