

Common Assaults on the Gospel

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INTRODUCTION

By assaults we are talking about additions to the message of FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are responsible to be His representatives. We are ambassadors of Christ who are to give testimony to the person and work of the Savior. When it comes to the message, there is only one message (or gospel) that we may proclaim and remain faithful to the Bible. Unfortunately, confusion abounds with respect to the content and presentation of the good news of God's grace in the person and work of Christ.

Our message is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the message of salvation through His person and work. That sounds simple enough, but it is not nearly as simple as it sounds. The simple message, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," has been assaulted from early on. Since the message is crucial to salvation, since anathema is pronounced on those who misrepresent it or change it (Gal. 1:6-9), we need to know the message. If we are to be true to the Bible and to the grace of our Lord, we need to be able to share the gospel clearly and avoid the distortions.

Outside the doctrines related to the Person and work of Christ, there is no truth more far-reaching in its implications and no fact more to be defended than that salvation in all its limitless magnitude is secured, so far as human responsibility is concerned, by believing on Christ as Savior. **To this one requirement no other obligation may be added without violence to the Scriptures and total disruption of the essential doctrine of salvation by grace alone.** Only ignorance or reprehensible inattention to the structure of a right Soteriology will attempt to intrude some form of human works with its supposed merit into that which, if done at all, must, by the very nature of the case, be wrought by God alone and on the principle of sovereign grace.¹ (Emphasis mine)

From the early days of the church, the church has faced the problem of those who wanted to add to the message. In Acts 15:1 we read these words: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Verse 5 tells us that these were men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed. They were members of the church and so, from within its own ranks, a controversy broke out concerning the exact nature and content of the message of the gospel.

The gospel by nature is a God-centered, grace-centered message which offers salvation as a free gift, a gift without cost, through faith in God's work through His Son rather than by man's work or works whether religious or moral (1Cor. 1:30; John 4:10; Acts 8:20; Rom. 11:6; 15:15-18; Rev. 21:6). The nature of the message, the condition of man (dead in sin and born spiritually blind [Eph. 2:1; 1Cor. 2:14; John 9:39]), and the activity of Satan (2Cor. 4:4; John 8:43-45) make this a difficult message to accept. Man naturally thinks he must add something to his salvation for it to be bona fide.

As a result, certain accusations are often leveled against faith alone in Christ alone: it is sometimes called "cheap grace" or "easy believism." But this is nonsense. The claim of "easy believism" so often aimed at those who preach "faith alone in Christ alone" is a misnomer. Simple faith is not easy for mankind who wants to add something to the work of God. Furthermore, **salvation in Christ is free, but it's not cheap.** It cost God the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus.

This study will be devoted to some of the more common ways the gospel is being assaulted or perverted, very often, by well-meaning and sincere people. This is no new problem. As mentioned above, it was a

problem in the early church starting in Acts 15 and it has been a problem throughout the history of the church. When I was in Seminary in the mid-sixties, one of my professors, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, taught a brief series on this in the church where my wife and I were attending in Dallas, Texas. It was an issue then, it is still a serious issue today, and it will continue to be an issue until the Lord returns.

While the debate over the issue of “faith alone in Christ alone” is not new, it has recently been brought to the forefront by the writings and preaching of John MacArthur, especially by his book entitled *The Gospel According to Jesus* in which he attacked the writings of: Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary; Dr. Charles Ryrie, author of *The Ryrie Study Bible* and a number of other books including *Basic Theology* and the book, *So Great Salvation*, which was written as an answer to MacArthur’s book setting forth a clear presentation of the free salvation position; and Zane Hodges, former professor at Dallas, who is a strong proponent of the free grace salvation position and author of *Absolutely Free* and *The Gospel Under Siege*. Other well-known proponents of the lordship Salvation position are Dr. J. I. Packer, well known for his books, *Knowing God*, and *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, and Dr. James Boice, author of *Foundations of the Christian Faith*.

While MacArthur’s books and preaching have created a furor of controversy with a number of debates resulting, it has had a good result in that it has caused the church to more clearly study and define issues and passages that are fuzzy to many people, and to defend the faith against these errors of evangelism or common assaults on the pure gospel of God’s grace which is faith alone in Christ alone.

- Assault 1: “Believe and Repent of Your Sins”
- Assault 2: “Believe Plus Make Christ Lord”
- Assault 3: “Believe and Be Baptized”
- Assault 4: “Believe and Confess Christ Publicly”
- Assault 5: “Believe and Do Good Works”

Assault 1: “Believe and Repent of Your Sins”

In this assault, repentance is conceived as a separate act and is consistently added to believing as a human requirement for salvation. In other words, rather than seeing repentance as a synonym for believing, one is saved by repenting (which in this view means a turning from sin) and by believing (putting one’s trust in Christ).

Few issues are of more vital interest to those who believe in heaven and hell than the question of what man must do to gain entrance into heaven. Answers to this question nearly always include a reference to repentance. Throughout church history nearly every theologian has taught that repentance is essential for salvation from hell. However, several disparate understandings of repentance have been advocated.²

The Word “Repent” in English Translations

- In the NASB, some form of the word (repent, repentant, repented, repentance, etc.) is found 73 times with 56 of these occurring in the New Testament.
- In the ASB, some form of the word occurs 103 times with 61 in the New Testament.
- In the KJV, some form of the word occurs 112 times with 66 in the New Testament.
- In the NIV, some form of the word occurs 74 times with 55 in the New Testament.
- In the New KJV, some form of the word occurs 72 times with 58 in the New Testament.
- In the RSV, some form of the word occurs 99 times with 59 in the New Testament.

- In the New RSV, some form of the word occurs 72 times with 57 in the New Testament.

Clearly, repentance is a prominent concept of Scripture, but it is obvious from the difference in the above numbers that the words of the original are not always translated in the same way by the translators of the different versions because some of the translators didn't believe our English word repent always conveyed the right idea. Why? Because of the misconceptions about this word. In fact, because of our preconditioned ideas about this word, very often "repent," is not the best translation at all.

Important Questions

The issue facing us is what exactly does it mean to repent? And related to this are other important questions and issues. What are we to repent of and for? Does it mean to feel sorry for something? Does it mean to feel sorrow for sin? Does it convey a resolve to turn from sin? Ryrie writes:

Since many consider sorrow for sin and repentance to be equivalent, the question could be worded, What is the place of repentance in relation to salvation? Must repentance precede faith? Is it a part of faith or a synonym for it? Can one be saved without repenting?³

Basic or Generic Meanings

Many, if not most, terms have basic or generic meanings that must be understood within their context. In other words, the context is vital to a proper understanding of most words. Within the context most terms make immediate sense. Without the context you either misunderstand what is meant or you are left wondering. Two common English words we use regularly will illustrate the point. If we say someone opened the trunk, we could mean the trunk of a car, an elephant's trunk, the trunk of a man's body, a tree trunk, or something you store things in. Or if we say, someone walked on the bed, it could mean the flower bed, a bed of leaves, the bed we sleep in. The ingredient needed to make the meaning of the word clear is the CONTEXT. The following are two scriptural illustrations.

Salvation

The Word "salvation" is the Greek, *soteria* and *soterion*. The basic, unaffected meaning of the word *salvation* is "to rescue" or "to save, deliver." But we must ask a further question about this basic meaning if we are to understand its meaning in a particular context: To be rescued from what? In Philippians 1:19 Paul uses the word "salvation," *soteria*, to mean rescue from his confinement in Rome. Except for the KJV, most versions translate this word "deliverance." In that text salvation does not mean rescue from eternal damnation but deliverance from his present confinement in Rome. But, of course, in other contexts salvation does refer to being rescued from eternal condemnation [Acts 4:12] (Ryrie, p. 92).

Compare also Luke 1:71 referring to deliverance from Gentile domination, Acts 7:25 referring to rescue from Egypt, but Acts 13:47 by the context refers to salvation from sin and the gift of eternal life.

Redeem

Concerning the word "Redeem," Ryrie writes:

What does it mean to *redeem*? It means "to buy or purchase something." To purchase what, one must ask, in order to tailor this generic meaning to its use in a particular passage? In Matthew 13:44 a man redeems a field; that is, he buys it. This use has no relation to the redemption our Lord made on the

cross, though the same word is used of the payment He made for sin when He died (2Pet. 2:1). The basic meaning remains the same — to purchase — whether the word refers to paying the price for a field or for sin.⁴

Compare also Matthew 14:15 (buying food); 21:12 (buying in the temple); 1Cor 6:20; 7:23, (Christ's purchasing our redemption or salvation on the cross).

The basic meanings of these words remain the same, to save whether from a physical disaster or from eternal judgment, or to purchase whether to pay a price for a field, buy something in the market, or to pay the price for our sin. It's the context, however, which makes the difference as to the exact meaning.

Obviously, the same principle must be applied to the word *repentance*. The first question is, what is the basic meaning for the word repentance as it is used in the New Testament? For many people, *repentance* carries with it two ideas: (a) sorrow for sin, and, based on that, (b) turning from sin and going in a different direction.

These two ideas, sorrow for sin and turning from sin, are then added to believing in Christ, or it is explained that this is what faith in Christ means. In other words, you must feel sorry for your sins, turn from your sins, and trust in Christ for salvation. Then, added to all this is often a fourth — there must be a willingness to continue to turn from sin or you cannot be saved, or you are not really saved.

The Meaning of Repentance in the New Testament

The Greek Words in Question

Since our English word is a translation of the Greek of the New Testament, we need to look at the original language. "There are two New Testament Greek words which are translated *repentance* in the modern English translations: *metanoia* (and its verbal counterpart *metanoeo*) and *metamelomai*. The former term is so translated fifty-eight times in the New Testament; the latter only six times.⁵ This study will be concerned primarily with *metanoia*.

Metamelomai means "to regret, change the mind" and may connote the idea of sorrow, but not necessarily. It is translated by "regret, change the mind, and feel remorse" in the NASB and NIV, and in all but one of the passages where it is used, the primary idea is a change of mind (cf. Matt. 21:29, 32; 27:3; 2Cor. 7:8; Heb. 7:21).

Metanoia, the primary word, without question, means "a change of mind." It refers to the thinking of people who thought one thing or made one decision and then, based on further evidence or input, changed their minds. So, the basic sense is "**a change of mind.**" This is its meaning and use outside the New Testament and in the New Testament. It is a change of mind that leads to a different course of action, but that course of action must be determined by the context. In a context that deals with forgiveness of sin or receiving eternal life as a gift from God, the course of action is a change of trust because one now sees Jesus as the only means of salvation from sin.

Ryrie writes:

Sorrow may well be involved in repentance, but the biblical meaning of repentance is to change one's mind, not to be sorry. And yet that change of mind must not be superficial, but genuine. The presence or absence of sorrow does not necessarily prove or disprove the genuineness of the repentance.⁶

It is clear from 2Cor 7:9-10 that sorrow does not necessarily prove or disprove the genuineness of repentance. Sorrow may lead to a genuine change of mind, or as in the case of Judas, it may not. The point being that **sorrow and repentance are not the same thing**.

But again, the nature of the change and what is changed must be determined by the context. So, another question must be asked. About what do we change our mind? Answering that question will focus the basic meaning on the particular change and issue involved.

The Object of Repentance

Many today make repentance and faith two distinct and necessary requirements for salvation. In his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer writes:

The demand is for repentance as well as faith. It is not enough to believe that only through Christ and His death are sinners justified and accepted.... Knowledge of the gospel, and orthodox belief of it, is no substitute for repentance.... Where there is ... no realistic recognition of the real claims that Christ makes, there can be no repentance, and therefore no salvation.⁷

Is this what the Bible really teaches? *Believe* and *repent* are never used together as if teaching two different requirements for salvation. When salvation from eternal condemnation is in view, *repent* (a change of mind) and *believe*, are in essence used as synonyms. Lewis Chafer¹ wrote:

Too often, when it is asserted — as it is here — that repentance is not to be added to belief as a separated requirement for salvation, it is assumed that repentance is not necessary to salvation. Therefore it is as dogmatically stated as language can declare that repentance is essential to salvation and that none could be saved apart from repentance, but it is included in believing and cannot be separated from it.⁸

Roy B. Zuck writes:

Repentance is included in believing. Faith and repentance are like two sides of a coin. Genuine faith includes repentance, and genuine repentance includes faith. The Greek word for repentance (*metanoia*) means to change one's mind. But to change one's mind about what? About sin, about one's adequacy to save himself, about Christ as the only way of salvation, the only One who can make a person righteous.⁹

In Luke's rendering of the Great Commission he uses repentance as a single requirement in the same sense as believing in Christ (Luke 24:46-47). As Dr. Ryrie says of this verse, "Clearly, repentance for the forgiveness of sins is connected to the death and resurrection of Christ" (p. 97). The repentance comes out of the recognition of one's sin, but the object of repentance is the person and work of Christ, or faith in Christ. Interestingly, in Luke 8:12 he uses believe alone, "Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."

A comparison of other passages clearly supports the fact that repentance often stands for faith in the person and work of Christ.² Compare Acts 10:43 with 11:17-18; 13:38-39 with 2:38. Also, note Acts 16:31 which uses "believe" alone.

¹ Equating *believe* with *repent* is problematic because Jesus called men to do both (Mark 1.15). What is crucial to understand here is that repentance, as a work, contributes nothing to our salvation — and therefore salvation cannot be conditioned on it. However, repentance is a *hallmark* or *sign* of our belief, even if it is not a requirement of our salvation. — W.H. Gross www.onthewing.org Aug 2012

The stated purpose of the Gospel of John is to bring men to faith in Christ (20:31), **yet John never once uses the word repent, not once.** If repentance, when used in connection with eternal salvation, is a separate or distinct requirement from faith in Christ, then John does not give the whole gospel. And if you can believe that, you can believe anything. Speaking of the absence of John's use of repent in His gospel, Ryrie writes:

And yet John surely had many opportunities to use it in the events of our Lord's life which he recorded. It would have been most appropriate to use *repent* or *repentance* in the account of the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. But *believe* is the word used (John 3:12, 15). So, If Nicodemus needed to repent, *believe* must be a synonym; else how could the Lord have failed to use the word *repent* when talking to him? To the Samaritan harlot, Christ did not say repent. He told her to ask (John 4:10), and when her testimony and the Lord's spread to other Samaritans, John recorded not that they repented but that they believed (vss. 39, 41-42). There are about fifty more occurrences of "believe" or "faith" in the Gospel of John, but not one use of "repent." The climax is John 20:31: "These have been written that you may believe ... and that believing you may have life in His name."¹⁰

What about Acts 20:21? "... solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Some would say, "Doesn't this passage teach that faith and repentance are not synonymous and that repentance is a separate requirement?" NO! Paul is summarizing his ministry in Ephesus and what he solemnly proclaimed to both Jews and Greeks, specifically, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The two words, *repentance* and *faith*, are joined by one article in the Greek text which indicates that the two are inseparable, though each focuses on a different aspect of the one requirement of salvation, namely, faith in Christ.

We can legitimately translate it like this. "Solemnly testifying ... a change of mind about God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance, *metanoia*, focuses on changing one's mind about his previous conception of God and disbelief in God or false beliefs (polytheism and idolatry) about God (see 1Thess. 1:9). On the other hand, belief in Christ, as an expression of a change of mind, focuses on the new direction that change about God must take, namely, trusting in Christ, God's Son, as personal Savior.

It has also been suggested that in this summary Paul is emphasizing the distinction between the particular needs of Gentiles and Jews. Gentiles who were polytheistic needed to change their minds about their polytheism and realize that only one true God exists. Jews needed to change their minds about Jesus and realize that He is their true Messiah (Ryrie, p. 98).

Uses of the Concept of Repentance in the New Testament

A Synonym for Eternal Salvation

Metanoia is sometimes used through a metonymy as a synonym for eternal salvation. A metonymy is a figure of speech by which one name or noun is used instead of another to which it stands in a certain relation. These involve a metonymy of cause for the effect. The **CAUSE** is a change of mind about Christ and His gospel. The **EFFECT** is eternal salvation (compare 2Pet. 3:9, 1Tim. 2:4, Luke 5:32).¹¹

² But then, who would be the object of the repentance which John the Baptist called for? (Mat 3.1-2) Or what was the object of repentance before Jesus revealed himself to men? (Mat 4.17) The answer is that even in the NT, they were 'looking forward' to the Christ – WHG

A Non-Saving Repentance (*metamelomai*)

Under this category we might also include repentance in the sense of remorse, regret with the use of *metamelomai*. This aspect of non-saving repentance is a repentance or change of mind that does not lead to eternal life or the spiritual blessings sought. Two examples are Judas (Matt. 27:3) and Esau (Heb. 12:17). Compare also Matt. 21:28-32.

A Salvation Repentance

Salvation repentance is a change of mind that results in eternal salvation. This involves a change of mind about self, about one's sinful condition and inability to save oneself combined with a change of mind about Christ, that He is the Messiah Savior and the only one by whom man can find salvation (Acts 2:38; 17:29-31). Salvation repentance means a change in confidence; it means turning away from self-confidence to confidence in Christ, faith alone in Christ alone. The irony of all of this is that any other viewpoint is really not biblical repentance because it virtually borders on faith in oneself. "In this use *metanoia* occurs as a virtual synonym for *pistis* (faith)."¹²

A Christian Experience Repentance

This is a change of mind regarding sinful behavior. An illustration of this kind of repentance is found in 2Cor 7:8-11; 12:21; Revelation 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3, 19. By Paul's use of *lupeo* (to distress, grieve) and *metamelomai*, 2Cor 7:8-11 he clearly illustrates that *metanoia* does not mean to feel regret, but involves a change of mind.

For though I caused you sorrow (*lupeo*) by my letter, I do not regret (*metalomai*) it; though I did regret (*metalomai*) it — for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while — I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful (*lupeo*), but that you were made sorrowful (*lupeo*) to the point of repentance (*metanoia*); for you were made sorrowful (*lupeo*) according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow (*lupe*) that is according to the will of God produces a repentance (*metanoia*) without regret (*metamelomai*), leading to salvation; but the sorrow (*lupe*) of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow (*lupeo*), has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter (2Cor. 7:8-11).

Wilkin writes:

On some occasions *metanoia* is used in contexts where the change of mind in view is clearly indicated as having to do with one's sinful practices. For example, in Luke 17:3-4 Jesus taught the disciples that they were to forgive all who sinned against them if they came and indicated that *they had changed their minds* regarding their sin. In this case and others like it "repentance" would be a good translation choice.¹³

Conclusion

Ryrie writes:

To return to the main point of this chapter: Is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? Yes, if it is repentance or changing one's mind about Jesus Christ. No, if it means to be sorry for sin or even to resolve to turn from sin, for these things *will not save*... Is repentance a precondition to faith? No, though a sense of sin and the desire to turn from it may be used by the Spirit to direct someone to the Savior and His salvation. Repentance may prepare the way for faith, but it is faith that saves, not repentance (unless repentance is understood as a synonym for faith or changing one's mind about Christ).¹⁴

In the third of a series of excellent articles on the meaning of repentance, Wilkin writes:

I wish we could retranslate the New Testament. It would make teaching and preaching passages using *metanoia* simpler. It would eliminate the confusion many have when they read their Bibles and see the word *repent*...

In most cases when the English word *repent* occurs in the New Testament it is translating *metanoia*. *Metanoia* is not the equivalent of the Old Testament term *shub*. It certainly does not mean "penance." Nor does it normally mean "repentance." Rather, in the New Testament it retains its pre-Christian meaning of a change of mind. The English reader thus generally needs to read "change of mind"—not turn from sins—when he sees the word "repent" in the New Testament. The context must be consulted to determine the object of a person's change of mind.

The only times *repent* is actually a good English translation is when the object of *metanoia* is sinful deeds. A change of mind about sinful behavior is equivalent to repentance.¹⁵

Assault 2: "Believe Plus Make Christ Lord"

Similar assaults would also include "faith plus commitment" and "faith plus surrender to God."

The late H. A. Ironside tells the story of a lady missionary who, over a period of time, led a little Irish boy to the Savior.

Brought up a Romanist, he thought and spoke of penance and confessional, of sacraments and church, yet never wholly leaving out Christ Jesus and His atoning work.

One morning when the lady called again upon him, she found his face aglow with a new-found joy. Inquiring the reason, he replied with assurance born of faith in the revealed Word of God, "I always knew that Jesus was necessary, but I never knew till yesterday that He was enough!"

It was a blessed discovery, and I would that every reader of these pages had made it. Mark it well; Jesus is enough! "He, of God, is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption." "Ye are complete in Him." "God hath made us accepted in the beloved." These are only a few of the precious declarations of Scripture which show clearly that Jesus is indeed not only necessary, but enough.

You see, it is not Christ and good works, nor Christ and the church, that save. It is not through Christ and baptism, or Christ and the confessional, that we may obtain the forgiveness of our sins. It is not Christ and doing our best, or Christ and the Lord's Supper, that will give us new life. It is Christ alone.

Christ and ... is a perverted gospel which is not the Gospel. Christ without the "and" is the sinner's hope and the saint's confidence. Trusting Him, eternal life and forgiveness are yours. Then, and not till then, good works and obedience to all that is written in the Word for the guidance of Christians, fall into place. The saved soul is exhorted to maintain good works, and thus to manifest his love for Christ. But for salvation itself, Jesus is not only necessary, but He is enough.¹⁶

The Apostle Paul told Titus, "And let our people also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, that they may not be unfruitful" (Tit. 3:14). Peter likewise challenged his readers to produce good works (cf. 2Pet. 1:8-11). So it is entirely possible, indeed, if Christians do not diligently draw on their resources in the Lord, they will become unfruitful. Furthermore, the fact that the exhortation of Romans 12:1 occurs in the twelfth chapter and not in the third chapter of Romans clearly shows one can be a believer and still fail to be committed to the lordship of Christ. It shows commitment to the lordship of Christ is not a part of what is needed to be saved. If it is, then it seems the Apostle had a lapse of memory and left it out. The facts are, however, no one is ever totally committed to the lordship of Christ. There is always room for improvement.

But some say that in order to be saved, I must not only believe; I must also surrender to Christ's lordship or I cannot be saved or I haven't had a real work of grace in my life. Advocates of the lordship salvation position believe that a person must surrender every area of his or her life to Christ's absolute control in order to be saved. It is believed that one cannot receive Christ as Savior from sin without also receiving Him as Lord of one's entire life. Why is this view promoted? Very often, it is promoted because of concern over so many people who claim to be Christians, but give very little evidence through a changed life. I share their concern, as should every Christian, but the solution is not adding to the gospel message as an incentive to Christ-like living, but the communication of other Christian truth like the sanctification truths and the consequences of sin in the believer's life.

Concerning the belief that we should add surrender to the gospel message, we need to ask an important question. Since no one is ever 100 % committed, how much commitment or surrender is enough to be saved? Is it 5%, 10%, 20%? Is it okay to be a little bit committed, but not a lot? Is that the idea? Doesn't all sin fall short of the glory of God? Isn't that why Christ had to die for our sins in the first place?

Some proponents of the lordship position will answer, "you must be *willing* to submit even though no one is ever totally committed." Again we need to ask, "how willing?" Do you see what we get into when we think like this? The Scripture just does not teach such an idea! Yes, it calls upon the child of God to commit his or her life to Christ as Lord, but not as a means of receiving eternal life. The Bible teaches that salvation comes by faith alone through Christ alone. Of this subtle tendency, Chafer/Walvoord write:

In presenting the Gospel it is a subtle temptation to urge people not only to believe but also to surrender to God because of course this is the ultimate objective of their salvation. However, in explaining the terms of salvation this brings in a confusing human work as essential to salvation which the Bible does not confirm.¹⁷

The Lordship Salvation View

While there are variations within the lordship camp, all the lordship salvation proponents seem to believe in three things:

(1) The condition of eternal life is more than trusting in Christ

One or more of the following are also conditions of eternal life: turning from sins, being willing to turn from sins, total surrender or committing one's life to Christ, obedience, and persevering in the faith. Some include baptism in their list of conditions.

(2) The condition of perseverance

Another idea that is promoted is if you do not persevere, then either you were not really saved, or your faith was only intellectual, or you lost your salvation.

Undoubtedly because of the strong emphasis in Scripture on faith or believing in Christ for salvation (about 150 passages in all), proponents of the lordship persuasion find themselves in a quandary. They will often redefine saving faith as consisting of several aspects which include some form of works as evidence of real faith. This forces them into a very contradictory position. Note the contradictory elements in the Doctrinal Statement of a church that teaches lordship salvation. The statement about faith is prefaced with the following:

“Although there are several aspects that saving faith involves, the Scriptures clearly teach that it is not a work, but is itself solidly based on God's grace.”

But then faith is defined in such a way that it includes works. According to the Doctrinal Statement saving faith includes:

- *Knowledge of the Facts* — Faith must be based on the content of the Word of God.
- *Assent to this Knowledge* — A person must agree that the facts of Scripture are true.
- *Repentance* — There must be a turning from sin and turning towards God.
- *Submission to Christ* — There must be a subjection to the person and will of Christ with a desire and willingness to obey.

While new life should result in change or good works, works in the Christian life like turning from sin are a product of fellowship with the Savior or the Spirit-filled, Word-filled life. They are the result of abiding in the vine. Initial faith joins a person into the vine, but it is abiding that produces the fruit. This is why Jesus challenged His disciples to abide. Without it, we become unfruitful.

(3) The promises of the Word are not sufficient for assurance

For assurance of salvation, one holding to this position must also look to his works. They say believers cannot have 100% assurance of salvation merely by looking to the promises of the Word. In fact, many if not most in this doctrinal camp say that 100% assurance is impossible since no one's works are perfect and no one knows if he will persevere.

Mike Cocoris, a former Dallas Seminary classmate of mine, writes of a conversation he had with a lordship proponent:

Recently a Lordship Salvationist and I engaged in a lengthy discussion concerning the question, “What must I do to be saved?” At one point I asked him, “If I led someone to Christ tonight, could that person go home, lay his head down on his pillow, and know for sure that he was going to heaven?” The man with whom I was talking replied emphatically, “No!”¹⁸

But this is contrary to the clear statement of 1John 5:11-13.

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you **may know that you have eternal life**. (emphasis mine).

Care is taken to give lesser weight to John’s gospel than to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the New Testament epistles in formulating the gospel or the doctrine of salvation. This is very strange since the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, deal primarily with discipleship, and since John specifically tells us the purpose of his gospel is that people may believe in Jesus Christ that they may have eternal life (John 20:31).

The Free Grace Salvation View

The sole condition for eternal life is personal faith in Jesus Christ alone as one’s Savior. Christ is enough! This means faith in the person and finished work of Christ as the God-man who died for our sins is the sole basis of one’s salvation. None of the faith plus someone’s add-ons are conditions for eternal life. It is nonsense to speak of a free gift which costs us something or gives us something to do to get salvation (Rom. 4:1-6; 11:6).

The promises of the Word of God, based on the finished work of Christ, are sufficient for assurance of salvation (cf. John 6:37-40). While one’s works can have confirmatory value and demonstrate the condition of our walk with the Lord, they are not essential for assurance. Any believer can have 100% certainty of his salvation if he will look to the promises of the Word like 1John 5:11-13.

The Gospel of John is given a great deal of weight in formulating one’s view of the gospel and how one is saved. Why is this? Three major reasons: (a) Because of John’s explicit statement about the purpose of his gospel (20:31), (b) because of his repeated use of “believe” (found some 98 times), and (c) because of the absence of any other condition. Not all of the uses of believe in John have reference to believing unto eternal life, but a large number do.

Finally, because salvation is by grace alone through the finished work of Christ (Rom. 4:1-5; 5:19; 11:6), free grace salvationists believe salvation or eternal life can never be lost (Rom. 8:32-39; John 6:37-40; 10:28-29).

Arguments Against the Lordship Position

A subtle form of legalism

This position is a subtle form of legalism and a direct attack on the free gift emphasis of the gospel message so prominent in the New Testament. Proponents end up diluting the concept of salvation as a free gift.

In his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer writes, “It is not enough to believe that only through Christ and his death are sinners justified and accepted ... In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything.” I have a great respect for this man, but this is a flat contradiction. Just compare Paul’s argument in Romans 4:4-5 and 11:6.

Writing with regard to Packer’s statement, Bob Wilkin writes:

Frankly I find this view of the gospel appalling. It is gibberish to speak of a free gift which costs us everything. It is absurd to suggest that we should show an unbeliever all of the things which believers are commanded to do and not to do in Scripture and then have them promise to do the former and not to do the latter from now on faithfully. Such a gospel is not a free gift. It is an earned wage. Romans 4:1ff. and approximately 150 other passages which condition eternal salvation upon faith alone in Christ alone contradict such a view.¹⁹

Salvation by Works

Ultimately, the lordship position leaves people trusting in their own record or performance and merit and not that of Christ. In the final analysis, under such a view, people are saved by their works, but the New Testament emphatically states that men are not saved by works (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5).

Roy Zuck has a good illustration on this point:

If I offer my wife a gift and then tell her it will cost her something to get it, it is no longer a gift. Salvation is a gift from God. But if someone says a person must commit, surrender, obey, forsake all, or deny self in order to receive that gift and be saved, that implies that salvation is not a gift after all.²⁰

Passages used to support lordship salvation can and should be explained in connection with discipleship or rewards in the kingdom — in these passages, it’s not *entrance* that is in view, but *inheritance* or *rewards* (2Pet. 1:10-11).

Salvation versus Sanctification

In other words, salvation is confused with sanctification or conversion with consecration. As Zuck writes:

The lordship view does not clarify the distinction between sanctification and justification, or between discipleship and sonship. It mixes the condition with the consequences. It confuses *becoming* a Christian with *being* a Christian.²¹

These passages deal with the **consequences** of sin on fellowship, physical health, inheritance in the kingdom or rewards or their loss, but not on **entrance** into the kingdom of God.

An Illustration is Luke 14:16-33. First, when those invited to the banquet find excuses not to come (a reference to unbelieving Israel), the servants are told to go out into the highways and hedges and compel people to come to the banquet. The banquet is a picture of the kingdom (vss. 16-24). In other words, there are no requirements. Entrance is free. However, in the next section, verses 25f, the Lord shows that in order to be His disciple, one must be willing to count the cost. This is not a call for salvation, but a declaration of what is involved in being His disciple. Furthermore, the emphasis is not so much that Christ would not let such a person be His disciple, but that such a person who had not counted the cost would not be able to be His disciple: when it came time to make those tough decisions, they would not be willing and able to do so because they had not dealt with their values and eternal priorities.

No Room for Carnality

The lordship position rules out the concept of carnal Christians (1Cor. 3:3).

The lordship position leaves no room for spiritual regression in a believer's life or it is minimized. The fact is the Bible is full of examples where believers fell into sin and in some cases stayed in that condition for some time. David is a classic example. Lot, who is called a righteous man (2Pet. 2:7), was actually one whom I would not want to use as an example to follow.

With the lordship salvation view, there is ultimately no room for the carnal Christian; only Christians who act in a carnal way. This is precisely the statement of John MacArthur in his book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 97, footnote 2). Concerning 1Cor 3:3f and MacArthur's view, Ryrie writes,

Notice that Paul does not merely say that Christians "can and do behave in carnal ways" (quoting MacArthur); he plainly states, "You are carnal." How then can one charge that "contemporary theologians have fabricated an entire category for this type of person — 'the carnal Christian' (again quoting MacArthur). Obviously, such a designation for some Christians is not a fabrication; it is a scriptural teaching.²²

Clearly then, the text of 1Cor 3:3 and the condition of the Corinthians as they are described in the book of 1Cor shows the contrary. MacArthur is begging the question.

Misunderstands Salvation Passages

The lordship position misunderstands salvation passages which use "Lord" as a call to surrender one's life to Christ's lordship (Rom. 10:9).

In relation to Christ's lordship, there are two aspects. There is first of all the objective. This recognizes the fact that Christ is God, the sovereign Lord of the universe. Then there is the subjective which involves personal surrender of one's life or commitment.

Does Romans 10:9 call for the objective fact or the subjective commitment or both? Concerning this question, Everett Harrison writes:

"Jesus is Lord" was the earliest declaration of faith fashioned by the church (Acts 2:36; 1Cor. 12:3). This great truth was recognized first by God in raising his Son from the dead — an act then acknowledged by the church and one day to be acknowledged by all (Phil. 2:11)... Paul's statement in vv. 9, 10 is misunderstood when it is made to support the claim that one cannot be saved unless he makes Jesus the Lord of his life by a personal commitment. Such a commitment is most important; however, in this passage, Paul is speaking of the objective lordship of Christ, which is the very cornerstone of faith, something without which no one could be saved. Intimately connected as it was with the resurrection, which in turn validated the saving death, it proclaimed something that was true no matter whether or not a single soul believed it and built his life on it.²³

Roman's 10:9 is calling for the need to confess that Jesus is God. In this context Paul quotes the Old Testament a number of times and is dealing with Jewish unbelief, not lordship issues. "Lord" (the Greek *kurios*) certainly is used as the equivalent of *Yahweh* in the Old Testament. It is calling for the acknowledgment that Jesus is the "I Am" of the Old Testament and therefore God.

That Paul refers to confessing that Jesus is Lord is also supported grammatically.

The passage should not be translated as does the NASB, “Jesus as Lord,” or as the KJV, “the Lord Jesus,” but as the NIV, “Jesus is Lord.” This involves a fine point of Greek grammar involving the use of what grammarians call the “double accusative of object-complement” where one accusative is the direct object of a verb of “calling, designating, or confessing,” and the second accusative is the complement that makes an assertion about the direct object. Some grammarians would call the second accusative a predicate accusative (cf. Robertson, *Short Grammar*, p. 219). Generally, the first accusative is the object and the second is the complement, but, as here in Romans 10:9, this is not always the case. Since *Jesus* is a proper name, even though it follows the noun *Lord* by way of word order, *Jesus* functions as the direct object of the verb confess, and the other accusative, *Lord*, is its complement (See Daniel Wallace, *An Exegetical Syntax of the Greek New Testament*, Preliminary Draft, Zondervan, p. 151. The final version will be out in the summer of 1996). So the confession that is required is that “Jesus is Lord,” i.e., *Yahweh*, the God of the Old Testament.

Obviously, when a person confesses that Christ is God there is an underlying recognition or awareness that Christ has the right to rule one’s life, but the passage is not calling for a subjective commitment to Christ’s lordship in order to be saved. Instead, the passage is saying that for a person to be saved, he or she must acknowledge, believe, that Jesus was also God, God come in the flesh, the God-man and so the only one able to save.

Not all Scripture is Relevant

The lordship position rules out a large portion of the epistles as being relevant like Romans 6 and 12.

If being a true believer includes commitment or total surrender, then why do we have these passages which were written to believers? If they were written, as it is claimed, simply to challenge us to more commitment, then how much is enough to be saved? Again we must ask the question, is it 10% or 50%, etc.? Where and how do we draw the line? The Bible says, “You shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart?” This is to be the goal, but does anyone ever measure up? And if so, for how long?

These passages in Romans and many others show us that saved people, true Christians whom Paul thought of as saved, do not settle the matter of the personal, subjective lordship of Christ until after they are saved. Paul deals with the gospel and the how of salvation in Romans 1-3, but he doesn’t deal with lordship or commitment until chapters 6 and 12. If commitment or surrender to the lordship of Christ was a part of the gospel, then the Apostle either didn’t know it or was careless in his responsibility. We know neither of these could be the truth for He wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Our good works are not always measurable and observable by men, not even by ourselves — especially when it comes to motives (1Cor. 4:4-5). Further, unbelievers can and do point to their good works, but they are unsaved.

The Issue of Divine Discipline

It is contrary to those passage which teach Christians can be disciplined unto physical death while still viewed as saved (1Cor. 5:1f; 11:28f; 1John 5:16-17).

These are passages written to Christians about Christians who were clearly not living for the Lord and would be disciplined as God’s children, in some cases, even unto physical death, yet they are still viewed as saved. Of course, these passages are usually applied to unbelievers by those in the lordship camp.

Assault 3: “Believe and Be Baptized”

The Baptismal Salvation View

Baptismal regenerationists, as we might call them, are not simply promoting water baptism as an important responsibility for a believer in Christ. This position says that unless one is baptized with a view to salvation, i.e., unless he or she is trusting in baptism for salvation along with belief in Jesus Christ, he or she is lost. Simply believing in Jesus Christ does not save. Belief alone is not enough. In fact, some maintain, as I was once told by an advocate of this view, that even if you have been baptized, it has no value unless you were baptized with a view to salvation and trusting in the baptism to save you.

The Free Grace Salvation View of Water Baptism

Water baptism is a ritual act that symbolizes a spiritual truth or reality. It is a public confession which portrays one’s faith in the person and work of Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit which joins the Christian into union with Christ and identifies him or her with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection unto new life. Baptism in water, a ritual, portrays that which is real, the baptism by the Spirit (1Cor. 12:12-13).

The ritual itself cannot save, but the truth it represents does bring deliverance first from sin’s penalty through one’s faith in Christ, and then deliverance from the power of sin as one appropriates the power of Christ’s death and resurrection by faith (Rom. 6:1-14).

Arguments Against Water Baptism as Essential for Salvation

It is Contrary to the Emphasis in John

While some form of the word “believe” is found some 98 times in the gospel of John, it is tremendously significant that this gospel which is written that men might have eternal life and be saved (John 20:31) does not once mention baptism.

What about the Lord’s words to Nicodemus in John 3:5? Can the “water” refer to water baptism as an essential part of regeneration? Regarding this passage Ed Blum writes:

Various views are given to explain Jesus’ words about being **born of water and the Spirit**: (1) The “water” refers to the natural birth, and the “Spirit” to the birth from above. (2) The “water” refers to the Word of God (Eph. 5:26). (3) The “water” refers to baptism as an essential part of regeneration. (This view contradicts other Bible verses that make it clear that salvation is by faith alone; e.g., John 3:16, 36; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5.) (4) The “water” is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). (5) The “water” refers to the repentance ministry of John the Baptist, and the “Spirit” refers to the application by the Holy Spirit of Christ to an individual.

The fifth view has the merit of historical propriety as well as theological acceptability. John the Baptist had stirred the nation by his ministry and stress on repentance (Matt. 3:1-6). “Water” would remind Nicodemus of the Baptist’s emphasis. So Jesus was saying that Nicodemus, in order to **enter the kingdom**, needed to turn to Him (repent) in order to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit.²⁴

But even if Blum is correct, repent, especially in view of the emphasis in John, is a synonym for believing in Christ.

Rather, it is better to understand that the Lord intended Nicodemus to think in terms of Old Testament passages like Ezekiel 36:25-27 and the cleansing and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The Greek has only one preposition with both nouns, “water” and “Spirit” connected by “and” (*kai*). We can translate “of water, even the Spirit.”

We have two parallel phrases which are genitive constructions in the Greek text: (a) “washing of regeneration” and (b) “renewing by the Holy Spirit.” “Regeneration” and “Holy Spirit” are both in the genitive case. There are several uses of the genitive case in Greek, but with nouns of action like washing and renewing, the noun in the genitive points to the thing to which the action is referred, either as subject or object of the verbal idea. Are washing and renewing objective genitives or subjective genitives? If subjective, they produce the action as is evidenced by the translation of the NASB and the NIV, “renewing/renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Paul is writing of a renewing accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and not vice versa, i.e., “a renewing which produces the Holy Spirit,” an obvious absurdity. Both of these clauses are preceded by only one preposition “by” (*dia*), and are connected by “and” (*kai*). This would suggest two things: (a) Because of the parallel arrangement, we would expect both genitives to be the same, either objective or subjective, and since the second phrase can only be a subjective genitive, “a renewal by the Holy Spirit,” so must the first, “a washing by regeneration.” (b) The “and” (*kai*) is ascensive or explicative meaning “even,” or “namely,” so that the second clause is a further explanation of the first. We could render it grammatically, “the washing produced by regeneration, even (or namely) the rebirth accomplished by the Holy Spirit.” Regeneration results in a spiritual cleansing, the forgiveness of sin, and this is part of the rebirth work of the Holy Spirit.

This fits with Titus 3:5, “... by the washing produced by regeneration (rebirth), even the renewal by the Holy Spirit” (See below for an explanation of Titus 3:5).

It is Contrary to the Teaching of Paul

Romans 4:1-12: Verses 1-6 clearly show how a man is justified by faith apart from human works. Then, in verses 7-12 Paul uses Old Testament circumcision to illustrate the fact salvation has always been the same in every age. Men of every age are saved by walking in the steps of Abraham. He shows that Old Testament saints were justified by faith alone before circumcision was ever instituted.

But the truly important principle is that circumcision is to the Old Testament believer what water baptism is to the New Testament believer. The following parallels are instructive:

CIRCUMCISION	Physical, by a knife, by human agency, and visible to others.	A sign of faith in God’s work, but not the means of salvation.
BAPTISM	Physical, by water, by human agency, visible to others.	A sign of faith in God’s work, but not the means of salvation.

The point is, people are saved by faith alone apart from any kind of law, ritual, or ordinance.

Colossians 2:11-12. This passage also illustrates the above parallel. Circumcision in verse 11 is one “made without hands.” It is a spiritual work of God. It follows by the natural parallel that the baptism of verse 12 is the spiritual work of God, one made without hands. It is the baptism accomplished by the Holy Spirit of which water baptism is only a picture. The rite of circumcision of the Old Testament and the

ordinance of baptism in the New Testament both illustrate the work of God for man through Jesus Christ. The rituals are only pictures of the real which alone saves through faith alone.

1Cor 1:14-16. In this passage the Apostle somewhat de-emphasizes water baptism. The Apostle can hardly be said to have viewed baptism as indispensable to the gospel message. Not only was it his practice not to baptize his own converts, but he shows us here that water baptism as necessary for salvation is not a part of the gospel as is faith. The gospel message is that Jesus Christ, the God-man Savior, died for our sins, was raised from the dead, and we that can receive eternal life as a gift through faith. If baptism was necessary to be saved through the gospel, Paul could hardly have said “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel ...”

Ephesians 2:8-9. Baptism is clearly a human work that man does. Here the Apostle clearly declares that the basis of salvation is God’s grace through faith alone.

Titus 3:5. We should immediately be suspicious of an interpretation which understands the “washing” here to refer to any human ritual or work because of the emphasis of verse 5a. No mention is made here of faith perhaps because the emphasis is totally on what God has done rather than on any kind of religious or ritual work that man could possibly do — including water baptism. Unfortunately, some see the words “washing of regeneration” as a reference to baptismal regeneration even though this context is prefaced by, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done ...” Can this refer to water baptism? Not on your life! Why?

- The immediate context is emphasizing that salvation is a work of God and not man.
- Water baptism, no matter how you slice it, is a religious work. If water baptism is the basis of our regeneration, then it is a work of our righteousness or a righteous act produced by us.
- The passage is telling us that regeneration results in a spiritual cleansing, the forgiveness of sin and this is part of the rebirth work of the Holy Spirit. We can translate the last part of verse 5 as “by the washing produced by regeneration, even the rebirth produce by the Holy Spirit.”²⁵

It is Contrary to Luke 23:43

The thief on the cross was saved by faith alone. He obviously could not be circumcised or baptized. The principle applies regardless of whether one wants to argue that he was still in the Old Testament economy. He was saved by *faith alone*. The corresponding ritual or ordinance for the Old Testament period was circumcision, yet the thief on the cross was neither circumcised nor baptized, but he did get saved.

Answers to Passages Used to Support Baptismal Regeneration

Mark 16:16

First, there is a manuscript problem. The older and what many believe to be the better manuscripts do not contain verses 9-20. So there is some question as to whether these verses were a part of the original manuscript of Mark. First, it is theologically unsound to try to build a doctrine or support one on verses where there is a manuscript problem.

Second, assuming that these verses were a part of Mark’s gospel, does this passage teach that baptism is essential for salvation? Verse 16b, “but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” answers our

question. It is the unbelief that results in condemnation, not the failure to be baptized. Furthermore, “baptized” could be a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 12:13).

Water baptism is an evidence of one’s faith and a public testimony of what one believes. For this reason Mark included the concept of baptism with belief. But since it is not water baptism that saves, since belief is the issue, he quickly added the last half of verse 16.

Acts 2:38

First, we should recognize there are two possible grammatical ways this passage may be understood. The preposition “for” (Greek, *eis*) in the clause “*for* the forgiveness of your sins” can mean “with a view to, in order that,” (pointing to *purpose*), or it can mean “on the basis of, because of” (pointing to *result*) as it is used in Matthew 12:41, “they repented at (on the basis of, as a result of) the preaching of Jonah.” This simply shows that Acts 2:38 can mean “Repent, and each of you be baptized ... as a result of the forgiveness of your sins ...” Rather than saying, “Repent and be baptized in order to receive the forgiveness of sins,” Peter was saying, “Repent, and on the basis of receiving forgiveness, be baptized.

Chafer/Walvoord have a good explanation of this difficult passage:

As previously mentioned, in Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, he included baptism along with belief as a way of salvation (Acts 2:38). It should be remembered that as baptism is mentioned in Scripture, sometimes it refers to real baptism, that is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit which occurs at the moment of faith and in other cases to the ritual of water baptism. It is possible to take this verse in either sense. If it refers to real baptism, then Peter was saying that if the Jews believed and had this belief confirmed by being baptized into the body of Christ, they would be saved. Or if it refers to water baptism then Peter was saying that that ritual was an outward confirmation of their faith. In any case immediately afterward, Peter baptized 3,000 (v. 41), who were by this token publicly aligning themselves with Christ and indicating that they were leaving their former Jewish confidence in the Law.

For Jews to confess Christ publicly was a real problem because they often lost their families, their employment, and their wealth. For their faith to be confirmed by water baptism in this case made clear that they were genuinely saved. In any event ritual baptism does not save, and the reference to baptism in verse 38 does not suggest that water baptism was a requirement for salvation. The many instances in which faith is mentioned as a condition of salvation without reference to baptism should make this clear. Even Peter himself later said that forgiveness of sins is based on faith alone (10:43; 13:38-39).

In Acts 19 some Jews in Ephesus had been baptized by John the Baptist but had not put their trust in Christ. When they were informed that it was necessary for them to believe in Christ, the Scriptures recorded, “On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5). This again makes clear that water baptism in itself does not save but is a token or evidence that a person has put his trust in Christ.²⁶

Acts 22:16.

There are two commands (Greek imperatives) in this verse, but only one brings about the removal of sin, “calling upon the name of the Lord,” i.e., telling God you believe and trusting in His Son. The sentence, “Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name” should, according to Greek grammar, be divided into separate clauses with a semicolon placed after “be baptized.” “Arise, be

baptized (clause one); and wash away your sins by calling on the Name of the Lord” (clause two). Baptism cannot wash away one’s sins. It is calling on the Lord, telling God you believe in His Son which is simply a way of expressing one’s faith in Christ.

1Pet. 3:18-21

In this passage, Peter tells us that baptism is prefigured by the deliverance of Noah’s family by water (cf. 3:20). Saving by baptism, therefore, is symbolic here, not actual. Peter quickly adds two statements lest he be misunderstood. Salvation in this passage is not based upon water baptism, but upon “the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” It is not based upon “the putting away of the filth of the flesh.”

Assault 4: “Believe and Confess Christ Publicly”

The late Dr. Chafer wrote regarding this issue:

The ambition to secure apparent results and the sincere desire to make decisions for Christ to be definite have prompted preachers in their general appeals to insist upon a public confession of Christ on the part of those who would be saved. To all practical purposes and in the majority of instances these confessions are, in the minds of the unsaved, coupled with saving faith and seem, as presented, to be of equal importance with that faith.

Two passages are often used in order to justify public confession, Matthew 10:32-33 and Romans 10:9.

Matthew 10:32-33

“Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. “But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

Does this passage call for the public confession of the Savior as a part of the gospel message and as one of the requirements for salvation? If so, the 150 plus passages in the New Testament that call for simple faith in Christ would have to be wrong. Rather, the Lord was challenging, not unbelievers, but His own disciples with regard to the commission He gave them to go to the lost sheep of Israel (vss. 1-15). Such a task, due to the hostility of the religious leaders of Israel and the world in general (vss. 15-20), especially in the days of the Tribulation just before the return of Christ (vss. 21-23), would put them at risk of persecution. So there is the warning that if people maligned and persecuted the Savior, the disciples too could expect persecution (vss. 24-25). He then encouraged them against fear (vss. 26-31), challenged them to confess Him before men, and warned them against denying Him before men (vss. 32-33). This challenge and warning in this context refers to the commission of the disciples and, by application, to the responsibility of believers (those already saved) to be witnesses of the Savior.

To deny Christ before men would indicate that either (a) the one denying Christ was not truly saved, in which case, they would not be owned by Christ as one of His in His work as advocate before the Father, or (b) evidence that they were out of fellowship and operating in fear rather than in faith, in which case Christ would deny them rewards at the Judgment Seat (*Bema*) of Christ (1Cor. 3:12-15; Rom. 14:10; 2Cor. 5:9-10; 2Tim. 2:11-13). Peter, who denied the Lord during His trial before the High Priest (Matt. 26:57-75), is a good illustration of how believers may deny the Savior.

Romans 10:9

This is perhaps the primary passage used to defend adding the need of confession, so the focus here will be to give an overview of Romans 10:1-21.

The Prayer and Desire for Israel's Salvation (10:1).

In these verses we see the subject of the passage — the salvation of Jewish people. However, it obviously has application to the subject of leading men and women to Christ.

The Problem of Israel's Self-righteousness (10:2-3)

It is essential to note that the verses in question, verses 9-10, are often used to teach men must make some kind of public confession to be saved, perform a human work. These verses are set in a context where Paul shows this is precisely the problem with the nation of Israel as a whole: the problem of trying to do something to gain the favor of God. So rather than supporting public confession as a work that men do, the context supports the opposite conclusion.

The Provision of Righteousness Through Faith Alone (10:4-13)

(1) Christ's Termination of the Law for Righteousness (vs. 4). Christ brought an end to the Law as a means of righteousness or acceptance with God. The purpose of the Law was to show man's sinfulness. But a further outworking of this is that neither the Law nor any works system can gain merit or favor with God. The reason is seen when we compare Romans 8:1-3. All systems of law are dependent on man's weakness to fulfill them and man always falls short and misses the mark (Rom. 3:23).

(2) Moses' Declaration About Those Who Practice the Law (vs. 5). If a person seeks acceptance with God by keeping the Law, he must live by it, i.e., he must perfectly obey it or he becomes condemned by the Law itself (cf. Jam. 2:10-11; Gal. 5:3; Rom. 2:25 with Rom. 3:19-20; 7:7). Since no man can fulfill the Law, all men miss the mark and become condemned by the Law which finds man guilty (2Cor. 3:6, 7, 9; Rom. 7:10-11).

(3) God's Initiation of Salvation by Grace Through the Message of Faith (vss. 6-8). Regarding these verses Ryrie writes: "Quoting Deuteronomy 30:12-14, which emphasized the initiative of divine grace and humble reception of God's word, Paul applies this truth to the gospel, which is *near*, ready for a man to take on his lips and into his heart (Rom. 10:9)" (*Ryrie Study Bible*, p 1716). Note carefully that this word which man is to take on his lips and into his heart Paul defines as "the word (message) of faith which we are preaching." The message is not one of works, but one of faith in God's work brought down to man in grace. But what exactly is this message of grace?

Paul's Description of the Grace Message (vss. 9-13).

(1) The Message Described (vs. 9).

"Confess," *homologeō*, means "to agree with, say the same thing, acknowledge." As the context will show, the confession here is not to men, but to God and involves, as an outworking of faith in Christ, acknowledging to God one's faith in Christ as God come in the flesh. It involves agreeing with God's witness about Jesus as God's own Son. Literally the text says, "the Lord Jesus," but as explained above, it means acknowledging that *Jesus is God*. The passage is talking about acknowledging the deity of Christ

and thus the fact of the incarnation (cf. 1John 2:22-23; 4:2, 15 which uses the same word, *homologeō*). This passage is not calling for submission to Christ in the sense of lordship salvationists.²⁷

“And believe in your heart ...” This is the root — believing in the fact that God raised Him from the dead. Here we have the finished and efficacious work of Jesus Christ, His death for sin, authenticated by Christ’s resurrection. Remember, the resurrection declares that Jesus is God’s Son and that His death successfully dealt with man’s sin. Perhaps the point here is that this belief in Christ, that He is the God-man Savior, causes men to confess their faith to God in a prayer for salvation as the context will show (vss. 12b-13).

(2) The Message Explained (vss. 10-13)

“For with ...” Note the word *for*. This introduces this section, verses 10-13, as an explanation of verse 9 and the words “confess” and “believe.” Note that Paul now begins with “believe,” not “confess.” He began verse 9 with “confess” because of the order of the Old Testament quote used in verse 8 — mouth and then heart. But with verse 20, Paul reverses the order and deals with “heart” and “believe” before “mouth” and “confess” because this is the main issue.

In this he uses a chiasm, an arrangement of the clauses in such a way that they bring out the most important and central element of the passage.

OVERVIEW OF ROMANS 10:8-14

THE AVAILABILITY OF SALVATION	
ROM 10:8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”— that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,	Points to the initiative of God’s grace in bringing salvation to men.
MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY	
ROM 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved;	1. Confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord. In this context which deals with Israel’s rejection of Jesus, it means to acknowledge to God that Jesus is Yahweh of the OT. It is an affirmation of His deity. 2. Believe in the resurrection which confirms one’s faith in all that the resurrection proves (Rom. 1:4; 4:24-25).
PAUL’S EXPLANATION OF VERSE 9	
ROM 10:10a for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, (10b) and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.	1. Verse 10a — With the heart, from the inner man, man believes, puts his trust in the person of Christ which gives Christ’s righteousness and salvation. 2. Verse 10b — With the mouth he confesses, acknowledges, affirms to God his faith in Christ resulting in salvation.

PAUL'S SCRIPTURAL JUSTIFICATION FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (VSS. 11-13)	
<p>ROM 10:11-12a For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; [Explains faith]</p> <p>ROM 10:12b-13 — for the same {Lord} is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." [Explains confess]</p>	<p>1. Verses 11-12a — Quotes Isa. 28:16 to show Salvation comes by faith (man's first responsibility). This explains the "whoever," in vs. 11, i.e., there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (cf. Rom. 3:22, 29).</p> <p>2. Verses 12b-13 — Explains the other part of man's responsibility, the confession of the mouth. It means to call on the name of the Lord.</p>
THE QUESTION	
<p>ROM 10:14 How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?</p>	<p>Here again, the two key ideas, belief and calling on the Lord, are linked together and this corresponds to belief and confessing with the mouth in vss. 9-10.</p>

The Priority of Preaching the Faith Alone Message (14-17)

Since the issue is faith in the work of God for man in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there is an important question that must be answered. How can men turn from their religious works, as with the Jews, so they may come to Christ by faith alone? Only through the work of evangelism through believers who understand the message and go out proclaiming the glad tidings of God's gracious gift.

Note the emphasis: The Jews by-in-large rejected the message of grace because of their works mentality. Nevertheless, faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ, i.e., the telling of the story about the Lord Jesus Christ as the one and only means of salvation.

Assault 5: "Believe and Do Good Works"

Another assault on the gospel message of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone is "believe and do good works." The idea promoted is that one must both believe and do good works in order to be saved. If the good works are not present, then, either (a) you were never saved, you never really believed, or (b) you lost your salvation, or (c) you never got saved because you lack the good works required.

Some would argue that we are saved by faith alone, but if faith is alone (if there are no works), then you are not saved, your faith was only an intellectual faith, not a heart faith. In this view faith is usually redefined to include turning from sin and surrendering one's life to Christ. Assurance then, in the final analysis, is based on one's works or record rather than on the work of Christ and the sure promises of the Word like 1John 5:11-13 and John 5:24.

In the final analysis of the works viewpoint, works are added to faith in Christ in order to be saved. This means SALVATION BY WORKS AND ASSURANCE BY WORKS.

The Argument

The argument is that genuine faith always results in good works. Because of new life imparted to believers via spiritual regeneration, and because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in every believer's life, those who have genuinely believed the gospel message about the person and work of Jesus Christ will, as a general rule, produce some fruit, sometime, somehow. Jesus said:

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (John 6:56-57).

As the context suggests (vss. 60-69) eating His flesh and drinking His blood refers to the initial act of believing in Christ. This results in the gifts of regeneration and eternal life (vss. 50-51, 54, 58). But it also means the believer is brought into a new relationship with the Savior so that he abides (remains) in fellowship with Him (vs. 56). But it is this abiding or fellowship which is the cause for fruitfulness or good works in the life of the believer (John 15) and not just the presence of new life.

The Lord was speaking of a general maxim, of what is generally true. He was not stating an absolute — that which will always be true in the life of the believer. Many quote this passage and say, “See, true believers will abide and bear fruit and so prove they were really saved.” I believe that view is wrong because the Lord knew **some** Christians would not abide or remain in fellowship with Him, and the proof of this is John 15 where He commanded the disciples to continue to abide. If it is not possible to stop abiding, lose fellowship with the Lord, and thus stop bearing fruit, why would the Lord warn His disciples about this possible failure? This is what He does in John 15:1-6.

As a general rule, every Christian will bear some fruit, somewhere, sometime, somehow. But having said that, there are a few points of caution we need to make that affect the concept of good works or fruitfulness and their use as proofs for salvation and assurance.

As John 15 and many other passages of Scripture teach, the general maxim that believers will bear fruit does not mean that **all** believers will be fruitful or that a believer will **always** be fruitful (compare Paul's admonition to good works: Tit. 3:14; 2Pet. 1:8). Both of these passages indicate that a true believer might be unfruitful. These exhortations would be meaningless otherwise. The same principle applies to the Lord's admonition for us to abide in Him that we might be fruitful.

Though the following remarks bear on the lordship/mastery issue, they also apply here since these two issues (good works and lordship) are really tied together. How much fruit or good works do believers need to prove they are saved? How do we measure the amount of works or fruit necessary to be sure we are saved in the lordship/mastery or believe/works sense of the term? “Or how do we quantify the amount of defection that can be tolerated without wondering if I have saving faith or if I in fact lost what I formerly had?”²⁸

Ryrie writes:

The lordship response, in spite of its stringent demands on the nature of what the view calls saving faith, must either say (1) that a disobedient Christian loses his salvation, or (2) that some leeway exists for disobedience within the Christian life. Since many lordship people hold to the security of the believer, they opt for the latter.

So we read a statement like this: “A moment of failure does not invalidate a disciple's credentials (John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1988, p. 199). My immediate reaction to such a statement is to want to ask if two moments would? Or a week of defection, or a month,

or a year? or Two? How serious a failure and for how long before we must conclude that such a person was in fact not saved? Lordship teaching recognizes that “no one will obey perfectly” (Ibid, p. 174), but the crucial question is simply how imperfectly can one obey and yet be sure that he “believed” in the lordship/mastery salvation sense? If “salvation requires total transformation” (Ibid, p. 183) and I do not meet that requirement, then am I not saved? Or if my transformation is less than total at any stage of my Christian life, was I not saved in the first place?²⁹

Here then is a key question: “How imperfectly can one obey or be without works and yet be sure he is saved if works are the criterion for proof of saving faith and eternal life?”

On the other hand, if salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone and one’s works are a proof of the nature of one’s fellowship and maturity, then his works regardless of how small or great, become a criterion for blessing now and rewards in eternity. They concern *not my entrance* into heaven, but the *nature of my inheritance* in heaven.

We reap what we sow, but the harvest is not a matter of heaven or possession of eternal life, but blessing versus discipline now, and rewards versus loss of rewards in heaven (Heb. 12:7-13; 1Cor. 11:28-32; Rom. 8:12-13, 17; Gal. 6:7-9; 1Cor. 12-15; 2Cor. 5:9-10).

Ryrie writes,

My understanding of what fruit is and therefore what I expect others to bear may be faulty and/or incomplete. It is all too easy to have a mental list of spiritual fruits and to conclude if someone does not produce what is on my list that he or she is not a believer. But the reality is that most lists that we humans devise are too short, too selective, too prejudiced, and often extra-biblical. God likely has a much more accurate and longer list than most of us do.³⁰

A person’s fruit will not necessarily be outwardly evident. A person’s fruit may be private or erratic, and just because we do not see someone’s fruit does not mean that some fruit is not there. Furthermore, we may see a man’s fruit, but we cannot see his heart. We don’t know what motivated his works. The works may have been motivated by selfish desires, by his desire to impress, or to be accepted rather than by the Spirit and by love.

Many unbelievers (those who profess no faith in Christ) will demonstrate all kinds of good works like helping the poor, ministering to the sick, caring for their family, self-control, and working for the benefit of the community in other ways. Does this prove they know God? No! Does it save them? No! While works may give evidence of new life and fellowship with the Lord, it is still never a proof because there are too many variables that we just cannot see.

According to Scripture, bona fide fruit in the life of the believer is the result of pruning and abiding, of the work of God as the Vinedresser, and the response of the believer through fellowship and faith. When our Lord said, “without Me you can nothing,” He was not saying believer’s could produce no works, but that there could be no bona fide fruit — works that were the result of new life and the power of the Spirit.

Witnessing for the Lord is a good work, but in order for it to be fruit it needs to be the product of His life working in us. Compare John 15:1-6; 26-27; Acts 1:8 with Matt. 7:13-28 and the warning about false prophets who sounded and looked like sheep, who witnessed and did other things in the name of Christ, but had not built their lives on His truth, i.e., on Christ.

If a person gives a cup of cold water to a thirsty man, it may be:

- The result of fellowship with the Lord and so also of salvation.
- The result of a works-for-salvation mentality like with the religious Pharisees.
- The result of a desire to be accepted by others or to impress people. In this case it is a good work, but not the fruit of the Spirit or of fellowship with the Lord. Motives are important and say a lot about the source (1Cor. 4:5; Jam. 4:3).
- Or it may be the result of natural human compassion.

If a man claims to be a Christian by the things he does and says: he goes to church, prays, and says he knows the Lord, but refuses to help someone in need when it is within his power, what does this indicate about the man? It could indicate the person is not saved — but not necessarily. Remember, many who do not know Christ help the poor. But refusal can also indicate the person is out of fellowship and not walking by an active faith in the indwelling Holy Spirit (1John 3:16-17; Gal. 5:22-23; Jam. 2:15-17).

What's the point? Works do not necessarily prove a man's salvation. Then what are some of the values of a person's good works?

The Value of Works (Fruit)

Because of the many variables and the problems outlined above, works are not designed to be the fundamental means of assurance of salvation. Assurance is based on something more absolute — the work of Christ and the Word. (Assurance of Salvation was covered in Lesson 2 of Book 1 in this series, *The Assured Life*.)

- Good works glorify God especially when our motives are right and He is the source of those works because we are abiding in Christ (1Cor. 4:5; 6:20; 2Cor. 9:13; 1Pet. 2:12; 4:16).
- Good works witness to others of God's love and of the truth of the claims of Christ. They can give evidence of the authenticity and power of the gospel (2Cor. 6:3-6; 1Thess. 2:1-12; John 13:34-35).
- Good works minister God's love to men (1John 3:17).
- Good works promote peace and order in society (Rom. 13:1-4; 1Pet. 2:14).

So let's not compromise the gospel of grace by adding anything to what man must do other than believe the message of God's saving love in Christ. Let's all be challenged as believers to grow in Christ, to submit to His lordship, and allow Him to change our lives as we walk in fellowship with the Savior. Let's also remember that one of the evidences of salvation is the discipline of the Lord (Heb. 12:5f).

Thoughts on James 2:14-26

James 2:14-26 is one of the key passages used to support the need of adding works to faith in Christ. The thinking is something like this: We are saved by faith alone, but real faith is never alone, or the faith that saves is never alone," and James 2:14-26 is used to support this position. Does James 2:14-26 support this position?

There are three views on this passage:

(1) James is contradicting the Apostle Paul and teaching salvation by works.

(2) James is teaching that real or genuine faith will produce works and fruitlessness is a sure sign that a person is unsaved. “That faith” in 2:14, the kind of faith that is without works and fruitless, cannot save from hell.

MacArthur writes,

The Bible teaches clearly that the evidence of God’s work in a life is the inevitable fruit of transformed behavior (1John 3:10). Faith that does not result in righteous living is dead and cannot save (Jas. 2:14-17). Professing Christians utterly lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance ...”³¹

Compare also MacArthur’s statement on page 170.

(3) James is writing about the problem of the dead, inoperative faith of a Christian whose faith has lost all of its vitality and productivity because of his or her failure to walk with the Lord in the Word.

There is no question that this is a difficult passage, but much of its difficulty stems from our own preconditioned thinking, theological bias, the nature of English translations, and our understanding of certain words like “save,” “salvation,” “soul,” and translations like “that faith” in vs. 14.

There is no question that faith without works is in some way defective, but that does not mean that the person is unsaved or that their faith in Christ is not real. Scripture teaches that faith begins as a grain of mustard seed and must grow. If it is not fed and nourished by the Word and fellowship with the Lord, it becomes stagnant, the soul becomes hard, and the life becomes unfruitful.

Over and over again the Scripture posts warning signs for believers against the dangers of unfruitfulness (Tit. 3:8, 14; 2Pet. 1:8).

The wasteland of barren living was therefore a real and present danger which the New Testament writers faced with candor. In no way did they share the modern illusion that a believer could not enter that wasteland, or live there.³²

James’ Relation to Paul and His Theology

That James is not writing to refute or contradict the doctrine emphasized so strongly in Paul’s epistles is seen from two facts: (a) James was written very early, before the epistles of Paul that emphasize justification by faith without works. James was written in 45 A.D. and Galatians and Romans in 49 or 55 and 58. (b) That James and Paul were in harmony and believed in salvation by faith apart from works is clear from Acts 15:1f and Galatians 1:18-21; 2:9.

The Context and Thrust of James

The Recipients: Unquestionably, James was written to believers, to those whom James considered as saved. He was not questioning their salvation. This is apparent from the following:

- He identifies them as brethren in every chapter for a total of 15 times in this epistle (1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, etc.).
- He refers to his readers as “begotten of God” (1:18), a reference to regeneration or the new birth as a gift from God (1:17).
- As a warning against partiality he refers to their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (2:1).

- He also speaks about “the fair name by which you have been called,” a reference to the name *Christian* because of their faith in Christ and association with the Christian community (Acts 11:26; 1Pet. 4:16).
- He teaches and challenges them in ways that could only have application or meaning to genuine believers: (a) In 1:2-4 of the goal of trials to mature one’s faith and character; (b) In 1:5-8 and 4:2-3 he speaks of their privilege of prayer and of the need to pray in faith with right motives to receive answers for wisdom and to meet their needs; (c) In 1:12 of the promise of the crown of life; (d) In 1:20 of achieving or producing righteous character which has its origin in fellowship with God, i.e. God’s righteousness; (e) In 1:21f of receiving the engrafted Word which, like a mirror, is able to expose us and bring about much needed change; (f) And in 4:5 of the jealous concern of the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers to keep us faithful to the Lord, the Groom of the bride (cf. 4:4).

The Problem and Concern

While James knew his readers were born again, he also knew how they desperately needed to take in the Word and respond to its truth. The facts of the epistle show that though they were religious and orthodox in their faith, they were carnal, worldly, and legalistic. Legalism always nullifies the power of Christ in believers’ lives. It means they are trusting in their own ability and good works to be accepted with God and to feel significant.

As is clear in the epistles of Paul, this does not mean they were unsaved or only professing Christians. But it does mean they were unfruitful because they were laboring under the weakness of their own ability.

They were begotten of God (1:18), they were brethren (1:2, 16, 19, 2:1), they had faith in Christ (2:1), but they were religionists as is evident by James warning in 1:26 and by the following facts: (a) They were hearing the Word though not applying it (1:22-26); (b) they were meeting together as an assembly of believers (2:2); (c) they prided themselves on having the Law (2:10-11), and (d) some were wanting to be teachers in the assembly and were priding themselves on their mature wisdom (3:1-2).

So, while they had real faith in Christ for salvation (2:1), they were not experiencing the liberty and deliverance that should accompany salvation. Their faith in Him for daily living was dead and inoperative just as with the Christians in Galatia. Like the Galatians, they had fallen from a grace/faith way of life under the power of the Spirit (Gal. 5:1-5).

Again, they were external religionists who were seeking to live the Christian life by their own ability and this had neutralized the power of God. They had some religious works in the form of certain religious activities as mentioned, but they lacked a moment-by-moment vital faith fellowship with the Lord in and through: (a) the mirror activity of the engrafted Word (1:19-25); (b) through the ministry of the indwelling Spirit (4:5); and (c) through drawing near to God in honest confession and humble brokenness before God (1:21; 4:7-10).

While being religious externalists, they were being dominated by man’s wisdom and strategies for handling life rather than by God’s wisdom, the wisdom of the Word which they needed to apply personally (1:2-27). They were controlled by that which is earthly, worldly, natural, demonic (1:13-16; 3:13-18; 4:1-4).

As a result, while religious, they were lacking in bona fide Christ-like other-oriented works. They were under God’s discipline and perhaps on the verge of discipline unto death (cf. 1:21; 2:14; and 5:14-15, 19-20).

The following illustrates the failures of their inactive faith which failed to appropriate their wealth in Christ: (a) They were frustrated by trials (1:2-4). (b) The rich were trusting in their riches (1:10-11; 5:1f). (c) The poor were complaining of their lack (1:9). (d) They were ignoring those in need (1:27; 2:15-17). (e) They were guilty of sinful attitudes which were manifesting themselves in sins of the tongue — in fighting, quarreling, and criticizing (3:2-4:2, 11f). (f) They were guilty of favoritism (2:1f). (g) They were guilty of putting their business ahead of the Lord (4:13-17).

The Key Words of James 2:14f:

(1) Faith: James is not talking about a real versus a false or spurious faith, one which only claims to be real, but really is not. These were brethren (vs. 14), true believers with real faith in Christ for salvation. But as for their daily walk, their faith was dead, inoperative, and unproductive. Faith, in order to work and be productive, must have a valid object and be energized by fellowship with the Lord; it must grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2Pet. 3:18). Their faith had a valid object for salvation from sin's penalty, but not for the Christian life and victory against the power of sin. Again, compare Paul's argument in Galatians and in Colossians. See also Matthew 6:30; Colossians 2:6; Romans 10:17; 2Cor 5:7; 1Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13.

(2) Save: In James 1:21, James speaks about the Word's ability "to save your souls." Compare also 2:14 and 5:20. We need to be careful that we do not misunderstand this. The modern English translation has for many only one religious meaning — "to be saved from hell." But this is not what James meant nor what his readers would have understood. By context, this meant "to save your life" from God's divine discipline and the self-made misery of walking out of fellowship. Five times James uses the word *sozo*, "to save," which means:

- to save or deliver from peril, injury, suffering, or physical death (Matt. 8:25; 14:30; 27:40, 42; Mk. 13:20; Jam. 4:12; 5:20).
- to heal, restore to health or strength (Matt. 9:22; Mk. 5:24; Jam. 5:15).
- to save or deliver in a spiritual sense from the penalty, power, and presence of sin (1Cor. 1:21; Jam. 1:21; 2:14; 1Tim. 1:15). Used of the past, present, and future aspects of salvation. Some passages could refer to all aspects of salvation, past, present, and future.

We simply cannot limit this word to mean salvation from hell. James is clearly saying their faith, in the condition it was in, could not save or deliver anyone from the things that were dominating their lives. But he is not talking about salvation from hell. Why should he? This does not fit the context as demonstrated above. He did need to warn them, however, about the bondage and futility of legalism and dead orthodoxy, and about the consequences of sin — the loss of rewards and divine discipline even to the point of death (1:15, 21; 4:12; 5:1-4, 7-8, 9, 14-16, 20).

(3) Soul: Soul is *pseuche* which is translated "life" or "lives" as often as it is translated "soul" (43 versus 47 times in the NASB). In some cases (as in James 1:21) it would be better to translate it with the English word "life" or "lives."

(4) Works: James is speaking of deeds and actions which are the product of a vital, growing, productive faith in the indwelling Spirit (Jam. 4:5) and the engrafted Word (Jam. 1:21). Paul, by contrast, speaks of dead works which are done apart from faith, which proceed from the flesh and which are done to gain merit with God.

(5) Justified: This is the Greek, *dikaioo*, which has two uses: (a) To declare or pronounce righteous and refers to the imputation of righteousness through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1). (b) But it may also mean to show to be righteous (Mat. 11:19; Luke 7:35; Rom. 3:4; 1Tim. 3:16) (Abbot-Smith; Thayer). James uses it in this way in 2:21.

CONCLUSION

Hodges sums up the issue for the book of James and writes,

... James ... understood how easily Christians, who knew the great truth that God accepted us on the basis of faith alone, could fall into the error of downplaying good works altogether. He understood how readily doctrinal correctness could take precedence over practical, everyday obedience. In short, he knew the danger of dead orthodoxy.

One of Satan's methods of assault is to get us to lock up our shield of faith into our theological armory so that we never employ it on the field of combat and everyday life.

Too often Christians go about proudly proclaiming their theological position, their orthodoxy, and ungraciously denounce those who believe differently. They talk like theologians and behave like enemies at war.³³

In his little epistle, Jude calls upon the Church to "contend for the faith" (Jude 3). For us today, the faith refers to the body of revealed truth that has been handed down in the Scripture. It concerns the great fundamental truths of Scripture concerning subjects such as God, Jesus Christ, man, salvation, the Bible, and things to come including the personal return of the Lord.

This body of truth is called the faith because it must be received by faith, and because "the faith" contains the gospel which is a message of grace offering man a salvation that is free, without price, one that is to be received by faith rather than by human works.

But from as early as Acts 15, the church has had to contend against assaults on the gospel wherein people have tried to add some form of human works to faith alone whereby we could gain salvation like works of the Law, or circumcision, or its counterpart for today, water baptism. Truly, the gospel of God's grace in Christ is under siege and we need to be able to contend for the faith.

NOTES

1 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, Kregel Publications, p. 371.

2 GES Journal, Autumn 88, p. 11.

3 Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, Victor Books, p. 91.

4 Ibid., p. 92.

5 Bob Wilkin, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 89, p. 13.

6 Ryrie, p. 92.

- 7 J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, pp. 72-73.
- 8 *Vital Theological Issues*, Zuck, General Editor, Kregel Resources, p. 119.
- 9 *Kindred Spirit*, Summer 1989, a quarterly publication of Dallas Seminary, p. 5.
- 10 Ryrie, p. 98.
- 11 Bob Wilkin, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1989, pp. 18.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ryrie, p. 99.
- 15 Bob Wilkin, *Journal of Grace Evangelical Society*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Autumn 1989, p. 20.
- 16 “The Grace Evangelical Society News,” Vol. 4, No. 10, Oct. 1989, p. 4, Taken from *The Sword of the Lord*, Feb. 3, 1989.
- 17 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, Abridged Edition, John F. Walvoord, *Editor*, Donald K. Campbell, Roy B. Zuck, *Consulting Editors*, p. 195.
- 18 “Grace Evangelical Society News,” June-July, 88, p. 1.
- 19 Ibid., p. 3.
- 20 *Kindred Spirit*, Summer 1989, p. 6.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ryrie, p. 61.
- 23 Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976, 10:112.
- 24 *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament edition, Editors, John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, Victor Books, p.281.
- 25 We have two parallel phrases which are genitive constructions in the Greek text: 1) “washing of regeneration” and 2) “renewing by the Holy Spirit.” “Regeneration” and “Holy Spirit” are both in the genitive case. There are several uses of the genitive case in Greek, but with nouns of action like washing and renewing, the noun in the genitive points to the thing to which the action is referred, either as subject or object of the verbal idea. Question: Are washing and renewing objective genitives or subjective genitives? If subjective, they produce the action as is evidenced by the translation of the NASB and the NIV, “renewing/renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Paul is writing of a renewing accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and not vice versa, i.e., “a renewing which produces the Holy Spirit,” an obvious absurdity. Both of these clauses are preceded by only one preposition “by” (*dia*), and are connected by “and” (*kai*). This would suggest two things: (1) Because of the parallel

arrangement, we would expect both genitives to be the same, either objective or subjective, and since the second phase can only be a subjective genitive, “a renewal by the Holy Spirit,” so must the first, “a washing by regeneration.” (2) The “and” (*kai*) is ascensive or explicative meaning “even,” or “namely,” so that the second clause is a further explanation of the first. We could render it grammatically, “the washing produced by regeneration, even (or namely) the rebirth accomplished by the Holy Spirit.” Regeneration results in a spiritual cleansing, the forgiveness of sin and this is part of the rebirth work of the Holy Spirit.

26 Lewis Sperry Chafer *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, Abridged Edition, John F. Walvoord, *Editor*, Donald K. Campbell, Roy B. Zuck, *Consulting Editors*, p. 194-195.

27 See above, Assault #2, for a discussion of this verse as it pertains to the word “Lord,” or see *So Great Salvation* by Ryrie, p. 70-72.

28 Ryrie, p. 47.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 47-48.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

31 John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 23.

32 Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, Redencion Viva, Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, p. 120.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 122-123.

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http://www.bible.org/author.asp?author_id=22