

COMMENDATIONS

Bernie Koerselman has again touched on the most important issues of life for Christians and non-Christians alike, the issues of the true gospel, authentic faith, genuine salvation, and real assurance. He presents his case like the attorney that he is – with a plethora of evidence from Scripture. His exegesis and reasoning are sound, and his conclusions are irrefutable. This book is worth the investment of your time.

David Servant
Heaven's Family

I have had a street evangelism and prison ministry for 39 years. I am well informed on the Bible and what parts of the Bible American Christians choose to believe. That is the problem. This book is not "legalism" nor "works salvation". We are saved by grace through faith – but the only faith that saves is "obedient faith" as Abraham had. Saved people have the power of choice. Jesus said "Whoever puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). America has produced many false Christians and many lukewarm Christians. What kind of Christian did Jesus call for? This book gives the answer.

Tom Adcock, President
Jesus People Information Center

I read Bernie Koerselman's new book, *The Christian's Assurance of Salvation*, while ministering on Lake Masisea Tipishca in March 2011. I was amazed how relevant his message was for me during my time of preaching to many unreached people and immature Christians in 18 small villages in rural Peru! The error of antinomianism is alive

and well even among the remote poor of the nations. We simply must preach and teach God's Word without compromise, and that is what Bernie has done for us in this book. I plan to use this new tool to come against the lukewarmness and compromise that are so rampant in the worldwide body of Christ.

Chuck King
International Director
Heaven's Family

Bernie Koerselman has captured the heartbeat of God in his new book, *The Christian's Assurance of Salvation*. The leaders, pastors, and teachers in the western church largely declare a gospel that panders to the comfort of men's flesh; that typically present a God who is nowhere to be found in the Scripture. Through his legal training and practice as an attorney Bernie has been able to thoroughly and systematically build his case to unmask many false teachings. "Sola Scriptura" (by the Scripture alone) was the anthem cry of the Reformation, and the Scriptures are what Bernie has used to expose these many errors and to subsequently provide a solid foundation upon which our faith can rest. If you have wondered what is wrong with the Church you are attending; if you have wondered why the messages you hear leave you empty, then you must read this book.

Brian D Fields, Col. USAF (Retired)

Bernie has given us yet another "must read" book. I was privileged to read the electronic version before it appeared in print and was glued to it. I read it twice in just a couple of days. When I finished the first chapter, I said to myself, "Bernie's case is irrefutable." Because Jesus is the Savior of all who hear this fantastic good news, believe it and put their faith in Him, all true disciples must acknowledge him as LORD and obey his teachings and commands. For Jesus

to be our Savior, he must be our LORD! Bernie cites irrefutable evidence, both from the Bible itself and from staggering statistics of those who profess to accept Jesus as Savior and then quickly fall away, failing to make Him the LORD of their lives. This is a book that I wish would be read by all who proclaim the gospel – pastors, evangelists, missionaries, professors and students in theological seminaries, teachers and students in Bible Schools and colleges. This book has a message the entire global church needs to hear and ponder, leading to true repentance in the deepest meaning of that word. As Bernie often says, "This is a salvation issue."

Harvey Hoekstra
Founder, Audio Scriptures International

In a day where church leaders are succumbing to a watered-down Gospel to appease their congregants, it is no wonder that the LORD Jesus has used Bernie Koerselman's commitment to Him and His Word to pen this book at such a time as this. Bernie is never one to mince words. His training as an attorney is evident in his careful examination of Scripture and his no-nonsense explanation of what is required to have a saving faith. Scripture after Scripture, he deciphers key words to convincingly build a case against popular false doctrines that have infiltrated our churches. Without a doubt, the requirements for salvation that Bernie describes, and the utmost importance of obedience to God, will cause you to examine yourself and will challenge you to a deeper understanding of what it *truly* means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Read this book...it is a *salvation issue!*

Maria Duran

GOD brings me scripture like food to a growing child (Mat 18:2-3). This book courageously explains what scripture really says in contrast to widely accepted deceptive

theology. Do I obey? Thanks to this book, it can be easy and a pleasure! (Matt 11:30), even though it seems impossible or unreasonable at times when we walk in our mind instead of by faith (Mark 8:17).

Vincent Piotet

The Christian's Assurance of Salvation is essential reading for ministers who are tempted to bolster church attendance by preaching prosperity messages or once saved always saved.

For saints wandering from church to church and not finding the truth, it remarkably augments the Bible that teaches the unrighteous have no assurance of salvation.

The Bible study links are a bonus, allowing personal study or presentation of this material before congregations.

Charles H. Clever
Author and Missionary

My dear friend, Bernie Koerselman, has done it again. As in *Saving Faith* he takes on the task of clearly defining an often convoluted subject in Christianity. In the aforementioned book, he explains "What is true saving faith?" He now explains "What is the true assurance of salvation?" His cautious and meticulous approach to this vital issue leaves us with a balanced and complete analysis profitable for any true God-seeker hungry for a thoughtful and credible review of God's Holy Word. This is a very valuable revelation and a treasure house of knowledge for any library.

Michael W. Smith, President
HardcoreChristianity.Com

Bernie has once again done a superb job of “rounding up” and “corralling” both the true and the false presentations concerning a person’s salvation. Throughout this well thought out and orderly book, he expertly separates the fraudulent and deceitful doctrines and teachings that have infiltrated Christendom and brands them with the hot iron of God’s Word for what they really are – *heretical*. When the dust clears, there is not a shadow of doubt left in the reader’s mind as to what is truly the only way to be assured of one’s salvation. This book is a must-read for every believer who is willing to “saddle up” and ride the narrow trail with Bernie—a trail that will cause one to sit straight, hang on and dig deep in order to gain eternal, living water.

Jeannette Haley
Artist and Author
Gentle Shepherd Ministries

Bernie Koerselman’s book reminds not only those who are learned in the Word, but those new in the Word, that Jesus died and rose again so he will be Savior only of those who receive him as their Lord. This is a wonderful reference and reminder to all of the great need for *The Teachings and Commands of Jesus Christ*. An outstanding review of what the Scripture really means.

David and Bonnie Ward

"The Christian's Assurance of Salvation" is a unique, precisely written explanation of Biblical truth. Few have approached this subject with such careful attention to detail and scriptural authority. It is easy to read and understand and should be part of the library of all who are Christ-followers.

Linda Slykhuis
Bible Teacher

I have known Bernie for several years. After the LORD Jesus Christ, Bernie is my mentor. I once believed in the "once saved always saved" false doctrine that many are accustomed to hearing from the pulpit. For years, I have researched the subject of salvation directly from scripture, which has literally saved my misled life. I can attest that Bernie has met the burden of proof that a "saving faith" leads to "assurance of salvation." Bernie agrees that we are saved by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 2:8), but he also reminds us of James 2:19 where James said that believing is not enough. Brothers and sisters in Christ, I implore you to examine the scriptures as Bernie proves his points in his book, *The Christian's Assurance of Salvation*. Read it with discernment and you will see that he far exceeds any doubts about what it means to have a saving faith.

Steve Marquis
Real Estate Broker Phoenix, AZ

Other Writings by Bernie Koerselman

are published at

www.bereanpublishers.com

Book: *Saving Faith*

Book: *Rebellion In the Church*

Bible Study: The Teachings and Commands of Jesus

Articles:

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What is the Gospel?

The Many Facets of a Saving Faith

Jesus Must Be LORD!

Do The Will of God

Christians Must Be Righteous

Conformed To His Likeness

Remain In Jesus

God's View of Sin

You Must Be Born Again

Moses' Law or Christ's Law

Test Yourselves!

Believe in Him

Jesus is LORD

Obedience: The Mark of a (True) Christian

Obedience: Evidence of a Saving Faith

Good Works: Evidence of a Saving Faith

Fruit: Evidence Of a Saving Faith

The Most Important Questions

Fraud In the Presentation Of the Gospel

Deceit In the Presentation Of the Gospel

Listening In
Open Letter To Pastors
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Sabbath, Sunday, Or ...
Can Sinning Cost Salvation?
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Are Christians Sinners or Saints?
Should Christians FEAR God?
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A Millennial Sabbath?
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When Are Christians Forgiven?
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To My Quality Lady, My Wife Dar

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue.....	1
Preface	3
Introduction	5
Chapter 1	11
John's Tests.....	11
Test One: Do You Have the Son?	11
Test Two: Are You Walking in Darkness?	16
Test Three: Without Sin? Not Sinned?.....	17
Test Four: Do You Obey His Commands?	19
Test Five: Do You Walk as Jesus Did?	20
Test Six: Do You Love the World?.....	22
Test Seven: Do You Deny Jesus Is the Christ?.....	24
Test Eight: Do Jesus' Teachings Remain In You?	26
Test Nine: Do You Continue To Sin?	27
Test Ten: Are You Born Again?	28
Test Eleven: Do You Do What Is Right?	29
Test Twelve: Do You Love Your Brother?	30
Test Thirteen: Do You Care For Needy Brothers?	32
Test Fourteen: Assurance When We Obey!	33
Test Fifteen: Do You Love God?.....	34
Chapter 2	36
Fraud and Deceit In the Presentation of the Gospel	36
Fraud	36
Deceit.....	49
Antinomianism.....	55
Calvinism.....	61
Unconditional Eternal Security	66
Easy Believism.....	77
Chapter 3	83
Jesus' Teachings and Commands.....	83
Introduction	83

We Must Repent of Our Sin.....	85
We Must Believe In Him	88
We Must Do the Will of God.....	89
We Must Be Righteous	92
We Must Not Be Wicked	94
We Must Not Sin.....	96
We Must Persevere to be Saved	98
We Must Forgive.....	100
We Must Bear Fruit.....	105
We Must Remain In Jesus.....	106
We Must Be Born Again.....	107
We Must Remain Faithful	112
We Must Love Our Brothers.....	117
We Must Obey the LORD Jesus	120
Love the LORD Your God With Your All	122
Become As a Little Child	124
We Must Not Swear.....	126
You Must Be Known By Jesus	127
We Must Never Disown Jesus	130
The Cost of Salvation	132
Our Words Can Condemn Us.....	136
Teachings and Commands of Jesus Bible Study	138
Chapter 4	141
More Tests	141
Test: Do You Continue in Sin?.....	141
Test: You Must Be Holy.....	143
Test: Deliberate Sin?	144
Chapter 5	147
Popular Anti-Righteousness Expressions.....	147
We're Not Under Law	147
Imputed Righteousness	148
Unconditional Love of God	149
I'm Just a Sinner Saved by Grace.	153
God Loves the Sinner, But Hates the Sin	154
Both Prospective and Past Sins Are Forgiven	155

Romans 7 Misunderstood.....	158
Conclusion.....	163

Prologue

I came to know the LORD later in life, at about age 43. Shortly thereafter, I remember talking with a woman in our Sunday school class who said that if she didn't have the assurance of salvation she couldn't be a believer. Sadly, her assurance of salvation was based on a false doctrine.

I remember even now how her words chilled me. Unknowingly, this woman was saying that her trust for salvation was not in the LORD Jesus, but in a doctrine. I knew full well, even then as a new believer, that the Christian's faith is to be in the LORD Jesus Christ.

Since then, I've observed much more of the same. It seems to me that the majority of those who claim to be Christians accept false doctrines that deny them salvation, while assuring them of salvation.

Because I've been trained in law and practiced as an attorney I tend to observe discrepancies more easily than others might. Part of my training as an attorney involves quickly recognizing when something said is contrary to other known information.

I've heard 1 John 5:13 quoted many times by pastors to assure people of their salvation. The passage says, "I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life." It was often told to people who had just repeated the "sinner's prayer." As you read this book, you will learn why that assurance, as used by those pastors, is false and misleading.

This short book has a three-fold purpose. The first, as the title indicates, will reveal what is involved for a Christian to have the assurance of salvation. In doing that, it will fulfill the second purpose – to reiterate what God requires for salvation. The third purpose will be to alert you to deception, false teachings and false doctrines that could

give you not only a false assurance of salvation, but could deny you salvation if you follow those false teachings.

My website's address, www.bereanpublishers.com, was chosen based on Acts 17:11. In that verse, Paul commended the Bereans because they searched the scriptures daily to see if what Paul told them was true. This is the theme of the website and this book – to determine the biblical truth of the issues discussed.

Jesus warned about what would happen in the last days:

“Many false prophets will appear and will lead many people astray. ¹² Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:11-12).

Many believe we must surely be in the last days because that prophecy seems to be fulfilled during our time.

Paul warned, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

This book will examine many such philosophies and contrast them with biblical truth.

Preface

What is your standard for truth? Your answer to that question may well determine whether you will be saved or not.

If a person gives what appears to be a credible argument on a given subject, do you accept that as truth?

If you are listening to a person who is well known, perhaps a television preacher or evangelist, or the pastor of a large church, do you accept what he says as truth? Do you accept what your own pastor teaches and preaches as truth?

The hardest part of this book for you may be your decision as to what you will accept as truth. If you have listened to false doctrines in your church or on Christian radio or television, perhaps for many years, you will be very reluctant to even consider another point of view, even if it is backed up by Scripture, and even if it proves what you've been taught is false.

You may decide you are angry at me, even though I am only the scrivener who is bringing biblical truth to your attention. You may say that anyone can interpret scripture to say anything they wish, so why should you pay attention to this? That is not true.

When Scripture is taken in context, it is simple to understand and rarely subject to multiple interpretations. The truth usually stands out clear and strong. People who have studied the words and sentence structure of Scripture say it was written at about the seventh grade level. That is quite simple, isn't it? Most of us should be able to understand that.

Unfortunately, today few professing Christians read their Bibles regularly. If they do not know the Scriptures, how could they possibly know when something they hear is true or false? They couldn't, of course. My concern for them is

the warning of Jesus at Matthew 7:13-14: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

If you persevere with this book, by the time you finish, you will recognize truth from falsehood in many areas. The truth you learn will be biblical truth. You will likely find the gate much smaller and the road narrower than you previously thought.

Is it important that the Bible be the basis for the truth we learn? It is utterly important. The Bible is the basis for what we know of heaven, hell, sin, and righteousness, and about God's provision for reconciling mankind to himself through his own Son – the LORD Jesus Christ – through his death on the cross. It is the Bible that explains to us who God is and his relationship to mankind. It tells us about Jesus, who he is, where he came from, what his redemptive mission was when he came to earth, and how he obediently fulfilled that mission, and who and where he is today.

Most importantly, and central to this book and any discussion of the assurance of salvation, the Bible reveals what God requires of those who want to be his children and who desire to share eternity with him.

As part of learning what is required for the assurance of salvation, you will learn what it means to have a saving faith. If you are not yet a true believer, you will have the opportunity to become one as you read this book.

Introduction

As we approach the subject of the assurance of salvation, we must do more than a glib review of familiar scriptures; we must scrutinize scripture to determine the real meaning. We must know to whom the scriptures were spoken or written, and determine whether the scriptures really address the subject we are examining. Consider the following questions:

Can anyone or any demonic force drag us against our will from the shelter and protection of our LORD? If we are determined to believe and be faithful, is there any force in heaven or on earth that can snatch us from our position in Christ and cause us to be damned? Praise God, the answer is NO! Paul answered this conclusively for us:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our LORD" (Romans 8:38-39).

The LORD Jesus said the same: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

True believers are secure. Paul and Jesus have enumerated every imaginable obstacle – external thing or person or power – that could come against us. Paul even went further saying, "nor anything else in all creation," to make sure that anything anyone could imagine would be included.

Surely those verses give us assurance, don't they? But assurance of what? It is the assurance that there is no force in heaven or on earth that can take away our

salvation and snatch us from the protective hand of our Father in heaven.

Many claim these verses give the assurance of salvation. A careful reading will show they do not. These verses do not speak of salvation, but rather of protection from anyone or anything that would seek to take away our salvation.

Likely, those who claim that those verses are an assurance of salvation also accept the false doctrine of "once saved, always saved." If this were a true doctrine, then those verses, according to them, would mean that you are assured salvation once you reach that protected position and would always remain in this condition. Through teachings often repeated in the Bible, we will soon see that this is not the message of Scripture.

It is necessary to put Scripture in context. It is the context of the New Testament that shows the "once saved, always saved" doctrine is false and that the above-quoted verses speak of the assurance of protection from the evil one, not the assurance of salvation.

As we read earlier, the Apostle John wrote, "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" (1 John 5:13).

This is one of the passages of Scripture that tells us that we may have the assurance – the knowledge – that we have eternal life.

Sadly, in almost every context in which I have heard that verse quoted, the application has been misstated. The verse says three things:

1. I write these things ...
2. To you who believe in the name of the Son of God
- ...
3. So that you may know you have eternal life.

Number 2 identifies the believers to whom John is writing – those who believe in the name of the Son of God.

Number 3 assures those believers that they may know they have eternal life – the assurance of salvation.

What about Number 1? It is here that the misapplication of this scripture often occurs. What are “these things” that John has written, and where are they found? The answer is obvious. Preceding Chapter 5, verse 13, are Chapters 1-4 and Chapter 5, verses 1-12. “These things” are the many tests the Apostle John said the believers are to apply to their lives to see if they have salvation. If they pass these tests, they can have the assurance of salvation.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul sets forth tests that clearly state that the person who fails the test has no inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. Paul urged, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5). We’ll also investigate Paul’s tests.

In addition to Paul’s and John’s tests, there are numerous teachings and commands of Jesus that show the gate is small and the road is narrow that leads to eternal life. In Chapter 3, we’ll see that many of those teachings and commands show us what we must do or must not do if we wish to gain salvation.

Finally, there are many conditional statements in Scripture. A conditional statement states a proposition, but then qualifies it with “if.” We’ll look at important conditional statements.

Are you starting to feel apprehensive? Instead of a feel-happy assurance of salvation, you may wonder what these tests are and if you can pass them. Instead of being apprehensive, be grateful. It is God himself who created these tests so that you will know where you stand with him. He wants you to succeed. Peter taught, “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but

everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He gives you tests so you can know what he wants and learn how to please him.

It is an awesome fact to me that the God of the universe wants you and me to be his children and he wants to be our Father. He is so jealous of that relationship that he insists we call no one father but him (Matthew 23:9).

Jesus knew he was establishing many standards for his followers to obey. He invited those who were weary and burdened to come to him so he could give them rest. Then he said,

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30).

The yoke for the person wholly committed to the LORD Jesus is easy. Following and obeying Jesus is something committed believers want to do. They want to please Jesus in everything they do. This "burden" of obedience is light – almost non-existent, as these believers are not thinking about their service to him as a burden, but rather as a joy because they are serving their Master and King whom they love.

When John told us the definition of love for God he said, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Don't let the evil one whisper in your ear that obedience is too hard. It is not! However, it is hard for the person who seeks to keep one foot in the world and the other in the LORD's kingdom. That can't be done and will soon prove to be too difficult.

You will note that I put the title "LORD" in all capital letters when I am referring to Jesus. There is a reason for this. The Greek word *Kurios*, meaning "Lord" in English, is a title of respect often used to address someone with greater power and authority than the one using it.

When Jesus came, there was no title to describe someone who had been given all power and authority in heaven and on earth – the King of kings and LORD of lords. There had never been such a person on earth, so no title could properly describe him.

Scripture describes Jesus this way:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

... That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:19-23).

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS
(REVELATION 19:11-16)

Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, *and every name that is named*, ... (Ephesians 1:20-21).

I distinctively differentiate the title "LORD" for Jesus by making it all capital letters. This distinction shows he is above every other use of the title "Lord." I pray it may be a reminder to you as you read this that the LORD Jesus has all power and all authority in heaven and on earth.

I occasionally use italics, underline or bold print (not used in the original texts) to emphasize certain words, phrases or sentences in the scriptures quoted.

You will notice that certain verses are used often – not by accident, but because they are at the heart of the gospel message and the points made in this book. Matthew 7:21 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 are fundamental to what we will be examining, so you will see them quoted frequently. I believe they are two of the most important verses in all of Scripture.

Now let's look at the tests the Apostle John created to let us know that we can have the assurance of salvation – assuming that we pass the tests.

Chapter 1

John's Tests

We're going to look at various tests, sometimes referred to as requirements – things we must do or things we must not do in order to have salvation. In order to have the assurance of salvation one must have salvation. Learning God's standards and rules might be hard for you if you learned false doctrines that give a false assurance of salvation.

As you read, try to put aside past teachings and concentrate on the scriptures to discern the truth. What do they say? Remember that Scripture, and only Scripture, tells us how to be saved, not conjecture that mankind has devised over the past centuries.

We must please God and accept his criteria for salvation if we would be saved. Likewise, if we are to obtain assurance of salvation, it must be based on God's way instead of false doctrines that will not save.

Test One: Do You Have the Son?

John's threshold test is found at 1 John 5:12: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." Life here means eternal life, i.e. salvation. Obviously, one who does not have life has no assurance of salvation.

Who is the Son of God and why should we believe in him? Are we to have blind faith and just accept that Jesus is the Son of God as true because that is what we are told, or is there evidence to support this claim?

God appeals to our intellect as well as our faith. He does not want or need blind faith. In order to inform us, God,

through his numerous prophets over thousands of years, has given us hundreds of prophecies about the coming Anointed One – the Christ.

Probability studies have shown it would be virtually impossible for anyone to fulfill the prophecies about the Christ by accident.

Perhaps the best known study, to show how statistically impossible it is for these prophecies to have been fulfilled accidentally, is related by Josh McDowell in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. According to Josh, the science of probabilities shows that coincidence is ruled out.

Josh recounted a study done by Peter Stoner published in *Science Speaks*. Peter considered only eight of the many prophecies about the Christ, namely that he would be born in Bethlehem, that he would be preceded by a messenger, that he would enter Jerusalem on a donkey, that he would be betrayed by a friend, that he would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, that the money would be thrown in God's house and then used to buy a Potter's field, that he would remain silent before his accusers, that he would have his hands and feet pierced and that he would be crucified.

According to the science of probabilities, the chance that any man could coincidentally fulfill only those eight prophecies is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. That is 1 in 10^{17} .

Peter illustrates how vast this number is by supposing we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the state of Texas. This quantity would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. After laying down the coins, we would mark one of the dollars and mix it into the mass, then blindfold a man and tell him to travel anywhere in Texas and to pick one silver dollar from the mix. What chance would he have of selecting the marked coin? Approximately the same chance anyone could coincidentally fulfill those eight prophecies.

Jesus not only fulfilled those eight prophecies, but all the

other prophecies about the Christ, except those yet to be fulfilled at his second coming. Peter considered the probabilities of Jesus having fulfilled 48 prophecies to be 1 in 10^{157} , a number too vast, and a probability too infinitesimal for the mind to grasp.

The early apostles believed and taught that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies that proved that he was the long-awaited Christ. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with them *from the Scriptures*. He said, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that *Christ* died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, that *he* was buried, that *he* was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

The Bereans were commended because they received the message with great eagerness and *examined the Scriptures* every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11).

Apollos, an early preacher, vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, *proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ* (Acts 18:28).

The only scriptures in those days were the Old Testament Jewish Scriptures which contained the prophecies about the Christ. Paul and Apollos proved from those Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ!

I find one prophecy in particular especially compelling – Daniel 9:25:

"Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'"

That is computed to be 483 years.

Various approaches have been used to interpret the prophecies to show the time of the coming of the *Christ*. Almost all of them fall within the lifetime of Jesus *Christ*.

The traditional view places the starting point of the prophecy as the first decree by Artaxerxes in 458 B.C., which places the appearing of the Messiah at 26 A.D. This view argues that the fulfillment of his coming coincides with the time of Jesus' baptism, which occurred the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar's reign (Tiberius Caesar began his rule in 11 A.D.). In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman population. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

The better view, according to Sir Robert Anderson, is that the exact date of the authorization of the rebuilding of Jerusalem (in the 20th year of Artaxerxes Longimanus the king) was March 14, 445 B.C.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem occurred precisely 483 years (of 360-day years) later **to the day** (based on Jewish and Babylonian calendars), when he rode the donkey's foal and was hailed along the route by crowds who cried, "Blessed is the *king* who comes in the name of the LORD!" (See Luke 19:38 and John 12:13.)

If the latter view is correct, Jesus' reply to the Jewish religious leaders, who were trying to stop the crowd from praising Jesus, is understandable: "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

Why would the stones cry out? Because fulfillment of the prophecy of the coming of God's Christ as King had occurred at the exact time. Jesus might have been saying that the coming of the Christ as king in fulfillment of prophecy had to be acknowledged by shouts of praise or the stones themselves would cry out.

The latter view would also support the prophecy of the time of Christ's death (Daniel 9:26), the same as the year of his coming as King. Jesus, the Christ, was killed a few days after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem – *just as Scripture said* the Christ would be (Micah 5:2); he was of

the line and lineage of David — *just as Scripture said* the Christ would be (Isaiah 9:7); he was born of a virgin — *just as Scripture said* the Christ would be (Isaiah 7:14). There are many other fulfilled prophecies about Jesus that prove him to be the Christ. For a list of approximately 48 fulfilled prophecies, see my book *Saving Faith*, Appendix — “Prophecies about the Christ Fulfilled By Jesus,” page 243.

The Jews had all these prophecies available to them. They had been waiting for the coming Anointed One (the Christ) for hundreds of years. Fulfillment of irrefutable prophecies about Jesus surrounded them, as well as the miracles that Jesus did that no one had ever done before – healing all manner of sickness, giving sight to the blind, and even raising the dead.

Jesus spoke to the Jews about these same prophecies:

“The Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form,³⁸ nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.³⁹ You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:37-40).

How did the Father testify concerning Jesus? The principal way was through the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus made this even clearer when he said, “These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”

When Jesus came, he meticulously fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and proved that he is the Anointed One, the Christ, who came to bring salvation to mankind.

How does one “have the Son”? The person who “has the Son” believes in his name – the totality of who he is and in his power and authority. Jesus told us of his power and authority: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto me” (Matthew 28:18).

Let's look at the condition John stated at 1 John 5:13. Salvation was for those "*who believe in the name of the Son of God.*" They were the ones who would have the assurance of salvation.

This verse is similar to John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whoever believes in him* shall not perish but have eternal life." Both verses speak to believing in the Son of God.

Consider the multiple names and titles of Jesus. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angels proclaimed his name to the shepherds: "A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the LORD" (Luke 2:11). An angel told Joseph, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sin" (Matthew 1:21).

Christianity is based on faith – on believing – in the person and the name of the LORD Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. To believe in Jesus as LORD is to believe in him as the Son of God. To believe in Jesus as the Son of God is to believe in him as LORD. Each title includes the other. (See Romans 1:4.)

In Chapter 2 we will examine in more depth what it means to believe in Jesus as LORD and how that relates to the assurance of salvation.

Test Two: Are You Walking in Darkness?

John stated,

"If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:6-7).

How do we know this is a test for salvation? Because at Rev. 21:8, Jesus said that the place for all liars will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. Thus, those who claim to have fellowship with Jesus but walk in darkness are destined for the lake of burning sulphur, not heaven.

John gives us the following example of walking in darkness:

“But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him” (1 John 2:11).

Who are the brothers of a Christian? They are other believers in Jesus. Jesus defined “brother” this way, “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). Hence, John’s admonition then is against those who hate their fellow brother or sister in the church. If anyone hates another believer, he walks around in the darkness and if he claims to be a believer and claims fellowship with the LORD Jesus, he is a liar!

Some professing Christians are accused of being hypocrites because they are on their best “Christian” behavior on Sunday, but “live like hell” the rest of the week. This would be another case of walking in the darkness, just like John warned.

Test Three: Without Sin? Not Sinned?

John is concerned about the denial of basic truths of the Christian faith, one being that we have a sinful nature. At 1 John 1:8, 10, he writes:

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us ... ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

Paul agreed: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

There is no assurance of salvation or salvation for the person who claims to be without sin, or for one who claims he has not sinned.

This may not concern such a person because he believes he is without sin, therefore, he feels no need to be forgiven or any concern about punishment for sin. Such a person is utterly deceived.

The good news for those of us who recognize that we have sinned, and that we are not without sin, is John's assurance at 1 John 1:8: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

John continues with another promise:

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

If you recognize that you have sinned and are not without sin, you have passed this test. This is your first step. Then you must also recognize your need to be saved from slavery to sin and your need for the shed blood of the LORD Jesus Christ to cleanse you from your sin, and to have him intercede on your behalf. Hebrews 7:25 assures us: Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Test Four: Do You Obey His Commands?

John states one of the hardest criteria – a conditional test stated often in the New Testament:

We know that we have come to know him **if** we obey his commands. ⁴The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵But **if** anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him (1 John 2:3-5).

This is very much like the first test, isn't it? We have the Son and we have come to know him **if** we obey his commands. Here we see the conditional "if" again. But this goes to the heart of assurance of salvation: "We *know* that we have come to know him **if** we obey his commands."

Are our churches filled with people who obey his commands? Do they even know his commands? Do you? Sadly, not often. Instead, often due to faulty teaching, our churches are filled with those who say "I know him," but they neither know nor do what he commands. John says such people are liars. We know that at the judgment liars will be condemned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur (Revelation 21:8).

Jesus spoke about those who have his commands and obey them: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (John 14:21).

During the course of this book, you will learn many of the commands of Jesus; later in this book I'll show you how you can have all his commands and learn to obey them.

Review 1 John 2:5 above for God's promise for those who do obey his word: "But **if** anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him." When God's love is

made complete in us, we will experience an assurance of salvation.

Most of the tests we will review could be classified under the broad heading of obeying God's commands.

Test Five: Do You Walk as Jesus Did?

John said, "This is how we *know* we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:5-6).

Again, the assurance of salvation and salvation itself, are known to those who walk as Jesus did.

The question is, "How did Jesus walk?" We really must know if we are to walk as he did. Another way to express this is "to be conformed to his likeness." Paul shows us God's test for salvation at Romans 8:29:

"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

"For those God foreknew" refers to those God knew would be saved. These people will have satisfied a condition that God predestined for those who would be saved – they must be conformed to the likeness of his Son, the LORD Jesus.

To "walk as Jesus did" is the equivalent of being "conformed to the likeness of his Son."

But those who excuse their sin by saying that conduct does not matter, and that only what one believes matters, claim that Romans 8:29 refers to being conformed to the likeness of Jesus in heaven, not here on earth.

Here is where God used the Apostle John to disabuse this argument in advance. John wrote about our present life in which, "Whoever claims to live in him *must walk as Jesus did.*" Lest one not get the point, John went further:

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because *in this world we are like him* (1 John 4:16-17).

Where are we to be like him? John said "in this world we are like him." Did you notice the bonus in those verses for those who live in love? He says that when we live in love, we live in God and God in us. As a result we will have confidence on the day of judgment – the assurance of our salvation.

What does God require of us to be like Jesus? The answer is surprisingly simple. Likely, we can summarize all of the characteristics of Jesus' that we must emulate into three traits: (1) Jesus was without sin, (2) Jesus was completely obedient to his Father, and (3) Jesus was like his Father.

Regarding the first character trait, Hebrews 4:15 reminds us, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin." This passage speaks about Jesus.

In relation to the second trait, at John 12:49-50, Jesus said,

"I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

At John 14:31 Jesus said, "the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me." Jesus repeatedly said that everything he did and said while on earth was what his Father told him to do and say (John 8:28, 12:49-50, 14:10, 14:24, 14:31).

As for the third trait, Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has

seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?" (John 14:9-10).

Have you noticed the wonderful parallels between Jesus and us? Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him (John 14:10). John said of us, "Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16).

Our goal, task and desire must also be to do and say everything our Father in heaven tells us to do and say, and to live in love. When we achieve this, we will be perfectly conformed to the likeness of our LORD Jesus and have assurance of our salvation.

Test Six: Do You Love the World?

John warned:

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but *the man who does the will of God lives forever*" (1 John 2:15-17).

Why would John warn: "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him?" It would be in part because it is Satan who is the prince of this world (John 14:30, 16:11). Thus, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, come from Satan, not from the Father.

James caustically denounced worldly Christians: "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

This scripture requires introspection. Do you love God, or do you love the world? Your salvation hinges on the truth. If you do love the world, it is time to repent of that and tell your Father in heaven that you wish to love him and the LORD Jesus with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and that you wish to renounce your love of the world.

I'm sure it is obvious that there is no assurance of salvation for those who love the world. Those who love the world are enemies of God.

John's warning also included the assurance of salvation: "The world and its desires pass away, but *the man who does the will of God lives forever*" (1 John 5:17). Again, we revert to Jesus' teaching at Matthew 7:21 where he said that *only those who do the will of my Father in heaven will enter the kingdom of heaven*. Those verses are in perfect harmony.

Change of Citizenship

We've learned from James and John that friendship with the world is hatred toward God, and that anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4). John tells us that the evils that beset us come from the world (1 John 1:16).

Scripture further tells us that if we are true believers we must disassociate ourselves from the world. We must adopt a new citizenship and disavow our citizenship with the world in order to gain citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Paul told the Gentiles: "So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family" (Ephesians 2:19).

Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the LORD Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

Paul urges us, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may*

prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Can we be friends with a world that hates God? Where is our loyalty? It must be totally with God and the LORD Jesus if we are to be saved. We must recognize that we are *aliens* here on earth. Peter, calling the Christians to pure lives, said: "Dear friends, I urge you, as *aliens* and *strangers* in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Likewise, the writer to the Hebrews spoke of the faithful of the past, "they admitted that they were *aliens* and *strangers* on earth" (Hebrews 11:13).

Renouncing the world and gaining citizenship in heaven is to be sanctified – set apart and holy. Later we'll see more about the necessity of being holy.

As citizens of a heavenly kingdom, we are subject to rules and laws that are different from the rules and laws of the world. The LORD Jesus gave us the rules and laws of his heavenly kingdom in his teachings and commands. Faithful citizens will seek to obey the laws of his kingdom and will have the assurance of salvation.

Test Seven: Do You Deny Jesus Is the Christ?

John asked, "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son.²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:22-23).

We observed in Test One that there are hundreds of prophecies about the coming Messiah (Christ) in the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies that were to be fulfilled at his first coming. In Test One, we reviewed the probabilities of the fulfillment of those prophecies by the LORD Jesus as related by Peter Stoner in Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, and

found it impossible that any person could have coincidentally fulfilled even eight of them.

God revealed his Son, Christ the LORD, to mankind *in the Scriptures* over thousands of years. When Jesus came, he meticulously fulfilled the prophecies, proving to all who would read these scriptures that he is the Anointed One of Scripture, the Christ, who came to bring salvation to mankind. We are truly without excuse if we fail to come to him and receive him as our LORD.

How important were these prophecies and their fulfillment?

Paul told us they were of first importance:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: *that Christ* died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*,⁴ *that he* was buried, *that he* was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*,⁵ and *that he* appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve” (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

There are two sets of key words in the italicized text above. One set is “according to the Scriptures.” The other set is “that Christ,” and “that he” and “that he.” It was the Scriptures that prophesied that Jesus would die for our sins, that he would be buried, and that he would be raised on the third day. No one else could fulfill those prophecies and no other book or writing has ever made such bold and accurate predictions.

Because of those prophecies in the Jewish scriptures, the term “Christ” (Messiah) was extremely important when preaching to the Jews. When they learned that this Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the coming Anointed One, the Christ, many were converted. This is almost certainly the reason Paul began his ministry in the cities he entered by teaching in the local synagogue and proving to them *from the Scriptures* that Jesus was the Christ. It was only when the Jews rejected his message that he turned to the Gentiles.

God painstakingly authored a multitude of prophecies about his Son that would easily identify him to the Jews as their promised Messiah for whom they had been waiting for many centuries. Thus, to reject Jesus as the Christ was to reject the Father. But to receive the Son – to acknowledge him as the Christ – was to have the Father as well.

Those who deny Jesus is the Christ are liars whose place is the fiery lake of burning sulphur. Neither salvation nor assurance of salvation is theirs.

Test Eight: Do Jesus' Teachings Remain In You?

John ordered his readers: "See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father" (1 John 2:24).

John appears to be writing to the people he has taught in the faith. He seems to know they once knew the truth, likely because he was the one who taught them. John would have taught them what Jesus taught the disciples about "remaining":

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (1 John 15:4-6).

Jesus taught very sobering truths of the faith. We must remain *in* Jesus; we can bear no fruit unless we remain *in* him; apart from Jesus we can do nothing; *in* him we will bear much fruit.

John 15:6 (above) is frightening: If anyone does not remain in Jesus he will be thrown into the fire and burned. This appears to be a fundamental teaching about salvation and the loss of salvation. Considering these scriptures, surely you agree that there is salvation and assurance of salvation only for those who remain in Jesus.

Test Nine: Do You Continue To Sin?

In Test Five, we learned that one of the characteristics of Jesus is that he was without sin. As we seek to be conformed to his likeness we must seek to be without sin.

In this test, John speaks directly about sin:

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that he [Jesus] appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:4-6).

In verses 4-6 above, John is showing us a way to recognize whether a person really knows the LORD. He states categorically: “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.”

What could that mean? An example might be if a man and woman are living together outside of marriage and then claim to have come to know the LORD, yet continue to live together without marrying. John says such people have neither seen him nor have known him. Another example might be of a person addicted to pornography who claims to have come to the LORD, but continues to watch pornography – a sin that promotes lust and is condemned as adultery by the LORD. Examples of other continuing sins might involve anger, hatred and unforgiveness, among other sins.

This test does not mean that when a person sins he is immediately denied salvation. At 1 John 1:9, John

encouraged his readers, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." However, part of true repentance, which includes confessing our sins to God, is to turn from that sin and not continue in it.

Based on John's teaching (above), surely you agree that those who continue in sin have neither salvation nor the assurance of salvation.

Test Ten: Are You Born Again?

As an extension of Test Nine, which concerns continuing in sin, John explains why a person will not continue in sin and whether or not a person is born again:

No one who is *born of God* will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been *born of God* (1 John 3:9).¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a *child of God*; nor is anyone who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:9-10).

According to John, there is a marked change in the person who is born again. John says such a person "cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."

Jesus described all of us before we were born again: "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34).

If you now find sin reprehensible whereas before you found it pleasurable, if you avoid sinful activities because you recognize them as wrong and don't want to offend your heavenly Father and your LORD Jesus, likely you have been born again.

Paul also spoke about the necessity of the Spirit of God and of Christ living in you:

"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9).

Paul adds that the person who has the Spirit of Christ living in him is not controlled by the sinful nature. This sounds very similar to John's claim that such a person cannot go on sinning.

Chapter 3, Commands of Jesus, will have more important information on the subject of being born again and how to be born again. It should be clear from John's and Paul's writings that it is essential to have the indwelling Holy Spirit if we are to have salvation and the assurance of salvation.

Test Eleven: Do You Do What Is Right?

This test is very blunt:

¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10).

The immediate question that arises from this scripture is, "What are we to do that is right?" The answer is found in Jesus' response to a question asked by a teacher of the law who asked, "Which of the commandments is the most important in the law of Moses?" Jesus responded:

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39).

This is consistent with the second part of 1 John 3:10: "nor is anyone who does not love his brother." Surely we would love our brother more than we would love our neighbor.

He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous (1 John 3:7). The righteous person is one who obeys the commands of Jesus and does the will of God. Remember that only those who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21) because they are the ones who do what is right and are children of God. They have salvation and the assurance of salvation.

Test Twelve: Do You Love Your Brother?

One of the fruits of the Spirit is love, which is expressed through the Holy Spirit in the love we have for other believers – our brothers and sisters in the LORD. John regards that love as a test of salvation:

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1 John 3:14-15).

Notice that John said "we *know* that we have passed from death to life." That sounds like the assurance of salvation, doesn't it? The love of which he speaks is not superficial. Instead, this love is a real, deep, abiding love that mirrors the love the LORD Jesus has for us. We express his love to others through his Spirit who dwells within us.

The direct opposite of these verses is that anyone who does not love remains in death – a spiritual death. And anyone who hates is akin to being a murderer. John makes it clear that such people have neither salvation nor the assurance of salvation.

In his second epistle, John reiterated: "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love" (2 John 1:6).

John taught more on this important subject. At 1 John 4:8-12, John said:

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

Not loving shows that one does not know God. God showed his love by sending his Son into the world that we might live through him (see 1 John 4:9 above and John 3:16). God showed his love for us by sending his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Because of God's great love for us, we also should love one another. If we do love one another, John says God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. Once again, that is how we have assurance of our salvation – when God's love is made complete in us.

How important is it to know God? (See 1 John 4:8 above.) Paul thought it was very important. At 2 Thess. 1:8, he wrote, "He will punish those who *do not know God* and do not obey the gospel of our LORD Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the LORD and from the majesty of his power ..."

We must love in order to know God. Love is a fruit of the Spirit. We will learn in Chapter 3 ("The Teachings and Commands of Jesus") how to become born again, how to gain the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit!

Test Thirteen: Do You Care For Needy Brothers?

This Test involves showing our love for our brother. We can easily relate to helping a person we love. John expressed it this way:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ *This then is how we know that we belong to the truth*, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us” (1 John 3:16-20).

We learned earlier that Test Twelve requires that we love our brethren. Here, John shows us how to know if we have that love. True love expresses itself in giving ourselves for others. In the extreme case, it might mean giving up our lives for theirs; more frequently, it will mean meeting the physical and material needs of others. There are ministries devoted to helping less fortunate brothers and sisters in Christ. The person who truly loves through the indwelling Holy Spirit will likely be attracted to such ministries and look for opportunities to help others.

Notice John again offers assurance of salvation if we help one another out of love: “This then is how we *know* that we belong to the truth ...” (1 John 3:19).

This test implies a second possibility that John addresses when he asked, “If a person sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” We know the Spirit of Christ would have pity. This is another test for whether a person has the Holy Spirit and has salvation.

Test Fourteen: Assurance When We Obey!

John taught:

“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God²² and receive from him anything we ask, *because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.*²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: *We know it by the Spirit he gave us*” (1 John 3:21-24).

This is the requirement for God to live in us: “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them” (3:24). Again, John relates the assurance of salvation to the Holy Spirit, saying *we know* he lives in us by the Spirit he gave us.

Jesus said the same at John 14:21: “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

Then Jesus said the same about his teaching at John 14:23-24: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.”

In response to our obedience to the teachings and commands of Jesus, God our Father and the LORD Jesus will love us and come to us and make their home with us. John said it this way, “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them” (1 John 3:24).

This passage also says, “If our hearts do not condemn us, *we have confidence before God*” ... Our hearts would condemn us if we disobey! And that is exactly what John says next: “because we obey his commands and do what

pleases him." Thus, we gain assurance of salvation when we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Test Fifteen: Do You Love God?

Do you love God? How would you describe your love for God? Is it a warm feeling? Is it a desire to be in his presence?

Scripture defines love for God very differently. God said, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD (Isaiah 55:8).

John defined love for God: "This is love for God: to obey his commands" (1 John 5:3). Again he emphasized, "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands (2 John 1:6).

Now consider that Jesus said the first and greatest commandment was this: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). If we were to substitute "obey the commands of the LORD your God" for the words "love the LORD your God" it could read:

"Obey the commands of the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

Do you see how that definition makes the need to obey much more compelling?

Many have memorized Romans 8:28 because it is such a reassuring verse: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love God, who have been called according to his purpose."

Now see how much more restrictive the verse becomes with the substitution of 1 John 5:3: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who *obey God's*

commands and who are called according to his purpose." Suddenly the universality of the verse disappears and this truth is restricted to those who obey his commands.

Notice that at John 14:15, Jesus established the same standard for himself as John did for God. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey my commands." In saying this, Jesus declared himself to be God. Jesus reinforced this at John 14:21 when he said, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." Likewise, at John 14:23, Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching."

Love for God is inextricably linked to obedience to his commands, just as love for Jesus is inextricably linked to obedience to his commands. As noted earlier, the commands of Jesus are the commands of God the Father. Jesus said and did only what God his Father told him to say and do.

If I ask you again *if* you love God, what would you say? If I ask you again *how* you love God, would you answer differently? I suspect your answers might be quite different compared to your initial response.

As we said in Test Thirteen, those who obey our LORD Jesus – those who do the will of God – have confidence before God (1 John 3:21). Those who love and obey also have the assurance of salvation.

Chapter 2

Fraud and Deceit

In the Presentation of the Gospel

Fraud

The gospel is the heart of the Christian message – the Good News about God’s loving redemption of mankind through the sacrificial death of his son, about his desire to save us from slavery to sin and to reconcile us to himself. The gospel also contains the rules (laws) pertaining to his Kingdom.

What would the result be if we were not told the truth about the gospel? This chapter will expose false doctrines which are peddled in the name of the gospel and do not lead their followers to salvation. We’ll examine both fraud and deceit in the presentation of the gospel.

Fraud can be defined as either an intentional misrepresentation (or a representation made with reckless disregard for the truth) intended to cause a person to act in reliance upon the misrepresentation.

What is the primary “fraud” in the presentation of the gospel? You might be astonished at how fundamental it is. It has to do with the person of Jesus Christ. In the first test in Chapter 1, we saw John’s requirement that we believe in Jesus as the “Son of God” – John’s favorite title for Jesus. But most of the writers of the New Testament referred to Jesus as LORD. Paul reminded us that the titles “Son of God,” “Christ,” and “LORD” all refer to Jesus – “... declared with power to be the *Son of God* by his resurrection from the dead: *Jesus Christ our LORD*” (Romans 1:4).

Presently, the title "Savior" seems to be emphasized in the Christian church. The exhortations from the pulpit are usually, "Accept Jesus as your (personal) Savior and you will have eternal life!" Sometimes there is a variation that states, "If you believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins you will have eternal life." Are these statements biblically true?

Nowhere in Scripture does it say or suggest that believing in or accepting or receiving Jesus as Savior can save us. On the other hand, it is clear from Scripture that Jesus must be our Savior if we are to have eternal life. The first announcement of his birth stated, "a Savior has been born to you" (Luke 2:11). Somehow, the Christian culture has carelessly assumed that because Jesus must be our Savior then all we need to do is accept him as Savior.

Likewise, nowhere does Scripture say or suggest that we can have eternal life by believing in something Jesus did. Some claim that if we believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins we will have eternal life. That is not true. Virtually all the scriptures that deal with salvation exhort us to believe *in him* – the person of Jesus (e.g., John 2:11, 3:15,16,18, 6:40, 7:39, 8:30, Romans 4:24, 1 Peter 1:8).

If we're not to believe in, accept or receive Jesus as Savior (or believe in something he did) in order for Jesus to be our Savior and to gain eternal life, then what are we to do?

What did Jesus say? Jesus told his disciples, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'LORD', and rightly so, for *that is what I am*" (John 13:13). Jesus said, "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24). He described his authority as LORD when he said, "*All power and authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth*" (Matthew 28:18).

Scripture states that we are to believe in and receive Jesus as our *LORD!* Perhaps the most familiar salvation scripture is Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is *LORD,*' and believe in your heart that God raised

him from the dead, you will be saved.” Likewise, Paul told the Philippian jailer, “Believe in the *LORD* Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31). That was the message of the early church – the church that persevered through intense persecution! They received Jesus as *LORD* (Colossians 2:6).

Paul exclaimed, “We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as *LORD!*” (2 Cor. 4:5). Paul summarized his ministry to the Ephesians: “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our *LORD* Jesus” (Acts 20:21). He taught the same to the Thessalonians, “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our *LORD* Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:9) and to the Romans, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our *LORD*” (Romans 6:23 – see also Romans 5:21).

Peter confirmed Paul’s teaching. At Pentecost he preached, “Everyone who calls on the name of the *LORD* will be saved” (Acts 2:21). He concluded his sermon, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both *LORD* and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Later he taught, “In your hearts set apart Christ as *LORD*” (1 Peter 3:15).

What does it mean for Jesus to be our *LORD*? It means that he must be our master, our King, our sovereign – the one who has total authority over our lives. I explained it to my grandson as, “He must be your boss.”

If we listen to what is preached in many of our churches we would surely conclude that the primary message of Scripture is that Jesus must be our Savior. But is that the primary message of Scripture? Not at all. In the New Testament, Jesus is called Savior only 15 times. Nine times God the Father is referred to as Savior. Jesus is referred to as *LORD* 618 times, 40 times more often than as Savior. Which title do you think God is emphasizing?

Is the distinction between Savior and *LORD* important? Is it important that we believe in Jesus as our *LORD*? Yes!

Knowing the difference is of eternal consequence, whether or not we will have eternal life. The proof is found at Romans 14:9. Paul explained:

“For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the *LORD* of both the dead and the living.”

How can that be? Doesn't Scripture teach that Jesus died and rose again to atone for our sins, to redeem us, so that we may be justified before God, so that we will be reconciled to God and presented holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation? Of course it does. Can Romans 14:9 be reconciled with those redemptive purposes for which Jesus died and rose again? Yes, of course – but by recognizing that all those redemptive purposes are valid *only* for those for whom Jesus is LORD! The reason Jesus died and rose again was so he might be LORD of all and Savior of only those who receive him as their LORD.

An easy way to remember what Scripture teaches is this:

Jesus will save all those for whom he is LORD.

What about those for whom Jesus is not LORD?

While Jesus is the consummate example of love, having given himself as a sacrifice so our sins could be forgiven, he is also a just and mighty ruler. Intertwined with another parable, Jesus told this parable about himself:

“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return ... But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don't want this man to be our king’... He was made king, however, and returned home. [When he returned, he said] ‘Those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them — bring them here and kill them in front of me’” (Luke 19:12, 14-15, 27).

Scripture says that Jesus is coming again to rule with an iron scepter (Revelation 2:27, 12:5, 19:15). In Psalm 2, God the Father speaks to his Son, the LORD Jesus: "You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery" (Psalm 2:9). God then spoke to all mankind:

"Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Psalm 2:11-12).

Jesus said, "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son ... he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man ... a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:22,27,28-29). All who reject Jesus as their LORD have done evil.

Christianity is often referred to as a relationship, not a religion. The distinction between these two views is important because of the type of relationship that would ensue by receiving Jesus as Savior versus receiving him as LORD. If he were only our Savior, then the relationship would be between Savior and the one saved. When Jesus is our LORD, the relationship becomes LORD and servant.

Which relationship does the New Testament teach? Overwhelmingly we are taught that the believer is a servant, or even a slave, of the LORD Jesus. Paul taught: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price (1 Cor. 6:19). Isn't that the condition of a slave – not free but bought by a master?"

The New American Standard Version of the Bible correctly defines our relationship to the LORD Jesus as his bond-servant. The bondservant is a special category of servant. In ancient Israel, sometimes a person would sell himself into slavery to his creditor to discharge his debt.

Ordinarily, according to Jewish law, all slaves must be freed every seven years, but sometimes a slave found his circumstances far better than his prior condition. Instead of choosing freedom, he chose to stay with his master as his bondservant. Becoming a bondservant is described at Exodus 21:5-6:

But if the servant declares, "I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free," then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

The master often honored him with a gold earring as a symbol of his special status as a bondservant.

These are the conditions for becoming a bondservant: (1) It must be voluntary, (2) it must be confessed publicly, (3) the decision must be based on love for his master, (4) he must surrender everything, and (5) he must serve his master for life. These are the same conditions for those who would follow Jesus and receive him as their LORD.

The New Testament writers declared themselves to be *bondservants of Jesus Christ*: Paul (Romans 1:1), James (James 1:1), Peter, (2 Peter 1:1), Jude (Jude 1:1) and John (Rev. 1:1).

All true believers are declared to be bondservants: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His *bondservants*, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His *bondservant* John, . . ." (Revelation 1:1, NAS).

Just like the relationship is dramatically different when Jesus is our LORD, so is our response to Jesus as our LORD. If Jesus could be only our Savior, our primary response would likely be gratitude for his saving us from God's wrath. When Jesus is our LORD and we are his bondservants, our primary response is to obey out of love for him. (See John 14:15.) Let me be clear here. Though

I presented a hypothetical alternative to receiving Jesus as LORD, Scripture does not. There is no scripture whatsoever that states or implies that there can be salvation for a person who purportedly only accepts or receives Jesus as Savior. This is UNBIBLICAL and false! I say "purportedly" because Jesus is not the Savior of those who claim to accept or receive him only as Savior. He is the Savior only of those who receive him as LORD.

Scripture confirms that obedience is our proper response to our LORD Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews related obedience to salvation: "He [the LORD Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who *obey him*" (Hebrews 5:9).

Jesus expected obedience from his followers. He asked those who claimed to follow him as LORD, but did not obey him, "Why do you call me, 'LORD, LORD,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Jesus said there could be no salvation without obedience: "Not everyone who says to me, 'LORD, LORD,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

To obey because we love Jesus is our natural response when we serve him as our LORD, and our obedience is evidence that Jesus is truly our LORD. It should be no surprise that Jesus made obedience part of his last instructions to his church. First he declared his Lordship: "All power and authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto me" (Matthew 28:18). Then he told his followers what he expected them to do in his absence. "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). He instructed them to do two things with these disciples: "Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teach them to obey all that I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:19-20).

If I were in a court of law prosecuting the church for fraud in its presentation of the gospel, I believe many churches

would stand convicted. Does your church, and do you, present Jesus Christ as LORD? Does your church, and do you, make it clear that there is no salvation unless Jesus is LORD? Does your church, and do you, teach that obedience is the necessary evidence (to God) that Jesus is your LORD? Finally, does your church, and do you, obey Jesus' command to teach new disciples to obey everything he commanded?

Those who deny that Jesus must be the LORD of those who would be saved are akin to the Pharisees and teachers of the law of Jesus' day. Jesus said to them, "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering" (Luke 11:52-54).

The key to knowledge in the present age is that Jesus is LORD and must be LORD of all who will be saved. Yet it is the religious establishment – much like the Pharisees and teachers of the law in Jesus' time on earth – who often adamantly oppose his Lordship. Just as in Matthew 7:21, they may call him LORD, but they do not do the will of his Father in heaven. The Father, as we have read in previous scriptures, desires that all men receive Jesus as LORD and be saved.

Those who present salvation as accepting Jesus as Savior, almost invariably fail to teach the importance of obedience. This double error leads to still another salvation-denying problem concerning the Holy Spirit.

It is correctly stated that all true believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Scripture teaches it is essential to have the Holy Spirit if we are to have salvation: "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9). We know we must belong to Christ to be saved because Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Many church leaders apparently believe that the Holy Spirit automatically indwells those who "accept Jesus as Savior,"

but is that what Scripture says?

Jesus told us how and under what conditions the Holy Spirit is given: "If you love me, you *will obey* what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth" (John 14:15-17). The conditions are that we must commit to: (1) obey Jesus (2) out of love for him; then Jesus will ask the Father who will give us the Holy Spirit. Scripture corroborates this teaching as Peter defended the disciples before the Sanhedrin. Speaking of the Holy Spirit he said, ". . . the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32).

Jesus explained the relationship that results from obedience to his commands:

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (John 14:21).

And again he said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me" (John 14:22-23).

Note that God the Father and Jesus love those who love Jesus and obey his commands, and they will come and make their home with those who love and obey Jesus.

Do you think of yourself as a friend of Jesus? Jesus said, "You are my friends *if you do what I command*" (John 15:14). Do you remain in Jesus' love? Jesus said, "*If you obey my commands*, you will remain in my love" (John 15:10). Do you obey his commands? Do you even know his commands? If the answer to either of those questions is "No," it is essential that you learn and then obey these commands as best you can if you would have salvation. Lest you begin to think of this as a burden, remember that

obedience out of love for Jesus is a joy – something true believers want to do. When we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we receive the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, the most desirable riches of all (see Galatians 5:22).

If we are not taught that we must believe in and receive Jesus as LORD, then we are likely not taught that we must obey him. If we do not commit to obey him, we will not receive the Holy Spirit. The misrepresentation of the gospel has led to three different reasons why such people will be denied salvation: (1) They did not receive Jesus as LORD; (2) they did not obey Jesus; and (3) they did not receive the Holy Spirit.

Consider Jesus' terrifying warning: "Many will say to me on that day, 'LORD, LORD, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

Who are these people that Jesus never knew? They are the ones who did not receive him as LORD, nor did they obey him, nor did they receive the Holy Spirit. But didn't they prophesy in his name, drive out demons and perform many miracles in his name? Yes, indeed. This is part of the great deception in the church that exists today. Didn't Jesus warn, "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible"? (Matthew 24:24). They will deceive by doing these things in Jesus' name.

A church that has been deceived by a fraudulent representation of the gospel – that fails to teach that Jesus must be LORD, that doesn't teach the need to obey his teachings and commands, and that is not empowered by the Holy Spirit – is simply part of a Christian-like culture, something I call churchianity. It lacks power and discernment; it is lukewarm; its members are hardly distinguishable from the rest of the world; and it compromises fundamental beliefs. Ultimately, it might question the infallibility of Scripture,

the deity of Jesus, the truth of the resurrection, and perhaps openly allow sin in the church and pulpit by accepting practicing homosexuals into membership and ordaining homosexual pastors. Such churches also might chase after manifestations of the Spirit but lack the discernment to know whether such manifestations are of the Holy Spirit or are demonic in origin.

How closely does this describe some of our churches today? I fear many of our churches are part of a changing Christian-like culture and are not firmly anchored on the unchanging, immovable rock – the LORD Jesus and his word.

Statistics have shown that, for the most part, professing Christians are undetectable from non-Christians. Where sins such as pornography, abuse and adultery are concerned, professing Christians are just as likely to commit those sins as non-Christians. But according to these statistics, there was a surprising variation when it came to divorce. They showed that 27% of professing, “born again” Christians divorced; 24% of other professing Christians divorced, but only 21% of atheists divorced. These are amazing statistics considering that Jesus, in very strong terms, said the only ground for divorce is adultery.

In a court of law, fraud is actionable. Contracts can be voided when fraud is used to induce a person to enter into the contract. Churches make representations to induce people to make decisions that will alter their lives forever. These decisions have far-reaching ramifications. Those who believe and accept those representations will change their lives and their lifestyles. They will give their money to the church and serve in the church in various capacities, taking time, sometimes sacrificially, from their other activities.

If the church induces them to make these decisions based on fraud – by presenting false information – it can do immeasurable harm. Not only might such persons not have a saving faith and therefore not have salvation (even though they may be assured and reassured that they are

saved), they also might become disillusioned and never again be willing to make a true commitment to the LORD Jesus that will save them.

Years ago I began to suspect that one of the evidences of fraud in the presentation of the gospel is the high percentage of people who quickly desert the church after having "made a commitment."

Ray Comfort's *Bride of Heaven, Pride of Hell* confirmed my suspicions. Ray quotes statistics of a major denomination in the United States that disclosed it obtained an incredible 294,784 decisions for Christ in 1990. Yet, in 1991, it could only find 14,337 in a Christian fellowship. There were 280,447 decisions that couldn't be accounted for. The leadership had no clue as to why this happened, but could only conclude, "Something is wrong!" The trend continued.

In August 1996, a leading U.S. denomination revealed that during 1995 it secured 384,057 decisions, but retained only 22,983 in fellowship. It couldn't account for 361,074 supposed conversions. Ray told of another crusade at which 600 decisions were obtained, no doubt with much rejoicing. But 90 days later, follow-up workers couldn't find even one person who was going on with his or her faith. In 1991 in Cleveland, Ohio, 400 decisions were obtained in an inner city outreach, but again, not one person could be found who continued in the faith.

Ray quotes Charles E. Hackett, the Division of Home Missions National Director for the Assemblies of God in the U.S.: "A soul at the altar does not generate much excitement in some circles because we realize approximately 95 out of every 100 will not become integrated into the church. In fact, most of them will not return for a second visit."

This phenomenon is not unique to the U.S. According to Ray, a pastor in Boulder, Colorado sent a team to Russia in 1991 and secured 2,500 decisions. The next year they found only 30 persevering in their faith. In Leeds, England, a visiting U.S. speaker acquired 400 decisions for a local

church. However, six weeks later, only two were persevering in the faith, but they eventually fell away.

A pastor who traveled to India every year since 1980, told Ray he saw 80,000 decision cards stacked in a hut in the city of Rajamundry – the "results" of past evangelistic crusades. But he maintained that it would be fortunate to find even 80 Christians in the entire city – 1/10 of 1%.

Ray also cited statistics from the Barna Research Institute that indicate 62% of Americans said they have a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. However, a Gallup Poll taken around the same time, revealed something interesting about a special group of 6%-10% of Americans who also say they are Christians. Mr. Gallup said of them:

"These people are a breed apart ... they are more tolerant of people of diverse backgrounds. They are involved in charitable activities. They are involved in practical Christianity. They are absolutely committed to prayer."

Neil Anderson in *The Bondage Breaker*, page 107, states a similar statistic, "It is my observation that no more than 15 percent of the evangelical Christian community is completely free from Satan's bondage." Although Neil alludes to those who are not free of Satan's bondage as "evangelical Christians," some of these "Christians" exhibited the same behavior traits described in Galatians, Ephesians and Revelation which will prevent people who live like that from entering the Kingdom of heaven.

Ray Comfort's emphasis is that we don't tell the truth when bringing people to Christ. As a result, the seed is scattered on stony ground, and although received with rejoicing, the person falls away quickly in times of difficulty and/or persecution. I agree with Ray that there must be a 100% honest presentation of the gospel.

The sequel to fraud is "Deceit in the Presentation of the Gospel." Likely, the combination of fraud and deceit is the

reason why 95% or more of the people who “come to faith” quickly fall away.

Deceit

While fraud is a misrepresentation of the truth, deceit is the failure to tell the whole truth, which causes the hearer to act to his detriment because he is not told the truth. Deceit involves what you are not told; fraud what you are told that is untrue. The following is an example of deceit.

Suppose you were going to buy a used car and the law requires the seller to tell prospective buyers about everything materially wrong with the car – particularly problems that couldn’t be detected with a simple inspection. Further, suppose you visit a used car lot and saw a nice car – just what you wanted – and reasonably priced. The salesman walks around the car with you, pointing out features of the car, but says nothing about anything being wrong with the car, so you buy it.

Sadly, after a short time, you notice something wrong with the brakes. A mechanic tells you they are badly worn. Then the car begins to exude smoke from the exhaust. Further inspection shows the engine has been damaged and will require a major overhaul. Next, the transmission begins to behave strangely. All these repairs will be costly.

What has happened? Did the salesman commit fraud by telling you a lie? No, the problem lies in what he *didn’t* say – his deceit. He didn’t say what he knew was wrong with the car even though the law requires full disclosure. As a result of his deceit, you would likely have the right to file a lawsuit against him to rescind the transaction and get a refund.

How does that example apply to presenting the gospel to an unbeliever? We are supposed to tell an unbeliever everything that is material to his/her decision to become a Christian. Jesus taught about having all the facts – knowing the cost – when making a decision to follow him.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30).

Some regard Charles Finney as the greatest American evangelist. His method was different than most. When he held an evangelistic campaign in a city, he would preach every night for three or more hours for months at a time. He would not allow anyone to receive Jesus as LORD for several days because he wanted seekers to know the cost before committing to follow Jesus as LORD. Subsequent surveys found that 85% to 90% of the people who committed to Christ in his campaigns kept on in the LORD. Cities were changed, even crime dropped.

Since Finney's time, there seems to be an increase in the reluctance to tell a seeker the truth about the faith because the truth is perceived as too hard. Instead of telling the truth, seekers are led to a "sinner's prayer," in which the person is told to "pray after me," which involves a simple prayer, often of repentance, and then to accept Jesus as his/her Savior (not as LORD).

Did you notice that Finney's results above are almost the opposite of the modern results quoted by Ray Comfort, with only 5% keeping on in the church? Why the difference? Is it deceit in the presentation of the gospel?

Do we, the Christian church, often commit deceit when we urge people to follow Jesus? You decide after we review the cost Jesus spoke about. But before we move on, we should first look at another aspect of fraud.

Directly related to our subject of deceit is another fraudulent misrepresentation of Scripture regarding salvation as a gift. We know salvation is a gift. Scripture says so at Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our LORD."

(See also Ephesians 2:8-10). The fraud is in how that gift is described. Often the speaker says, "It is a FREE gift! It costs you absolutely nothing!"

Is it free? If there are costs, what are they? A person will decide if he or she is willing to pay the price only after the costs are considered. Jesus said (through a parable) that anyone who chooses to follow him should know the cost in advance. Otherwise he may be unable to finish and will be mocked.

You might be scratching your head thinking, "I thought salvation is free and that Jesus paid the entire price on Calvary." As is the case with most fraud and deceit, part of this assumption is true. Salvation is not free, but Jesus did pay the entire price for the forgiveness of our sins on Calvary. Jesus made it possible for us to be saved by shedding his blood and dying for us so that our sins could be forgiven; he atoned for our sins, he paid the price to redeem us, and made it possible for us to be reconciled to God. That is the gift, by grace (unmerited favor), given before we could know to ask for it. Notwithstanding, it is sometimes accurately said, "Salvation is the most expensive gift you can ever receive. It costs everything you have!"

The cost of salvation is not to earn salvation and forgiveness of sins. This cannot be done. But Jesus told us about the necessary cost to *qualify* to receive salvation and eternal life. Let's look at the cost and determine if people who are considering becoming followers of the LORD Jesus should be told about each requirement. You'll better understand the use of "qualify" as we look at the first example.

The first and best-known qualification (requirement) is found in John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes in him* shall not perish but have eternal life.

Does the verse say that everyone will be saved? No. The promise is "*whoever believes in him* will not perish but have everlasting life." How about those who don't believe? John 3:36, only 20 verses later, answers this question: "*Whoever believes in the Son* has eternal life, but *whoever rejects the Son* will not see life, for *God's wrath remains on him.*"

Now you can see what "qualify" means. The gift of eternal life is available to all of us. To qualify, one must "believe in him" – have a saving faith. It is at this precise point that some churches tend to commit deceit. They fail to truthfully explain what it means to have a saving faith.

Faith is often explained as if it is a one-dimensional concept. A saving faith, as defined in Scripture by Jesus, is like a multifaceted diamond. As you look at the diamond from a distance, it is one unit, just like faith. But upon closer examination we can see different facets to the diamond, each brilliantly reflecting light, similar to the different elements of a saving faith.

Here is an example from the law that further illustrates the concept that faith has several elements. Consider the common-law definition of burglary. It is defined as the breaking and entering of a dwelling house at night for the purpose of committing a felony. Each of those elements must be present in order for a burglary to have been committed. If it did not happen at night, it is not a burglary. If it is not a dwelling house, it is not a burglary. If it is not a breaking or an entering, it is not a burglary. If it is not for the purpose of committing a felony, it is not a burglary. Each element must be present for the crime to be a burglary.

Likewise, if any of the necessary elements of a saving faith are missing, it is not a saving faith and the person will not gain eternal life. By not understanding that a saving faith is multi-dimensional – that it contains multiple elements – we misrepresent what it means to have a saving faith and commit deceit in presenting the gospel. The necessary elements of a saving faith are immediately recognized in

what Jesus (and other New Testament writers) taught: without it, "you cannot be his disciple," or "will not enter the kingdom of heaven," or "cannot be forgiven your sins," or "he will disown you before the Father," or "you will be cut off and burned," or "have believed in vain," or "have no inheritance in the kingdom of God," or "will not see God."

Dr. John R. Armstrong wrote: "Surely here is the missing note of almost all evangelical preaching in our time. We have treated faith as assent, as decision, or as mere recognition. But faith, by definition, is tantamount to obedience."¹

As Dr. Armstrong wrote, obedience is one of the elements of a saving faith. Indeed, it can be said it is the primary element that includes the others as sub-elements. At Matthew 7:21 Jesus said:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'LORD, LORD,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **only** *he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21).

Only those who obey – those who do "the will of my Father" – will enter the kingdom of heaven. Thus, we see that obedience – doing the will of the Father – is an essential element of a saving faith. Without it, you cannot be saved and go to heaven. The writer to the Hebrews made the same point: "he [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who *obey* him" (Hebrews 5:9). Notice, there are two kinds of obedience that are necessary for salvation – doing the will of the Father and obeying Jesus. Are they related?

Jesus said that everything he said and did while on earth was what his Father told him to say and do (John 8:28, 12:49-50, 14:10, 14:24, 14:31). Thus, everything Jesus said and did was the will of God. Is it any wonder that he is the source of salvation for all who obey *him*, or that he

¹ "Christians Aren't Perfect, Just Forgiven," by John H. Armstrong, ViewPoint, October-December 1999, Volume 3, No. 4, Pages 1, 9.

ended his great commission with the command to teach new disciples to obey all that *he* commanded them? (Matthew 28:20). We satisfy both conditions when we obey the teachings and commands of Jesus because each and every teaching and command is the will of the Father.

Who can possibly be certain they have clearly covered everything they should with someone they seek to win to Christ? Is it really necessary to explain each and every requirement? According to Jesus, we should count the cost before we begin to follow him. Is there a minimum that should be communicated to a seeker in order not to be guilty of deceit? Yes, there is.

There are two non-negotiable facts that must be accepted by anyone who would be saved: (1) Jesus must be LORD of all who would be saved; and (2) Jesus must be obeyed because he is LORD. It is an oxymoron to claim Jesus as LORD and not obey him.

In order not to engage in deceit, it is also important to make sure the seeker understands that those who would follow the LORD Jesus must give up everything they have (Luke 14:33). All other "costs" are included within this over-arching cost. Those who make the commitment to follow Jesus and who later learn they must love Jesus more than their spouse, children and other family members, or that they must take up their cross and follow him, are not surprised because they knew beforehand that they must give up everything to follow the LORD Jesus.

Lest the requirement to give up everything has been misunderstood, this does not mean that each person who commits to follow Jesus as LORD must immediately sell everything he has. The LORD has asked that of some, but for most of us, it means acquiring a new mindset. What we formerly owned, we now hold in trust for our master. Slaves don't own property. They care for it and manage it for their master. No longer do we lust after the things of the world; instead, we are concerned about the Kingdom of our LORD and how to please him.

In Chapter 3, we will examine several of Jesus' teachings and commands and see how each is a requirement for salvation – an element of a saving faith. With that knowledge, you'll be able to discern whether you have been taught the whole truth about what God requires for salvation, or if you have been deceived. The goal of this book is not simply to make you aware of deception, but through that knowledge to bring you to a saving faith and eternal life.

Antinomianism

Returning to Arizona from six years in New Zealand, my wife Dar and I again attended a mega-church in Scottsdale, Arizona, our church home before we left. We found that a tremendous theological change had taken place while we were gone. Before we left for New Zealand, I knew the senior pastor subscribed to the false doctrine of unconditional eternal security, but he seldom verbalized it. Upon our return, however, one Sunday the senior pastor talked about Christian adulterers and Christian homosexuals, assuring the congregation that the salvation of these people was not affected by their actions. Antinomianism had taken over the church and their doctrines.

As we'll see, antinomianism is widespread and has spawned its own offspring – more false doctrines that also drawing more millions away from heaven and into hell. We'll look later at a few of the most popular false doctrines.

What is antinomianism? The word "antinomianism" is comprised of two Greek words, "*anti*" and "*nomos*." *Anti* means opposed to; *nomos* means a law, rule, standard, a rule of life or moral conduct. The combination of anti and nomos gives us the definition of antinomianism: lawlessness; without, opposed to or against laws, standards, or rules of moral conduct.

The teachings and commands of Jesus are about standards and rules of moral conduct. Paul called Jesus' teachings and commands "Christ's law." (See 1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2.) Many of Jesus' commands and teachings are salvation issues, i.e., a person must do, or not do, what the commands say if he is to gain salvation. Of course, such commands are impossible to reconcile for antinomians. They argue that Jesus' commands do not apply to this day and age, that they were only for the Jews or that we are now under grace, not law.

You might already be ahead of me, correctly surmising that antinomianism is both fraud and deceit in the presentation of the gospel. You are correct.

The idea of lawlessness seems to appeal to many people. Churches that teach antinomianism are some of the fastest growing churches. David Servant, author of *The Great Gospel Deception*, reminded me that books written about church growth have one advice in common, which is not to make the people who attend feel guilty! That is amazing! One of the first things seekers must learn when they investigate Christianity is that every person is, by nature, a sinner, and is under the wrath of God because of sin. It is only through the LORD Jesus and his shed blood that our sins can be forgiven and we can be reconciled to God.

Shouldn't that be a primary message of the church? Of course, but instead it seems we are in a time prophesied by the Apostles 2,000 years ago: "For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and LORD" (Jude 4).

Paul prophesied to Timothy: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-5).

The rise of antinomianism helps explain why many church leaders, pastors and teachers simply ignore the teachings and commands of Jesus. As far as their beliefs are concerned, they are not subject to any law or rule of moral conduct. Therefore, why would they bother to teach new believers to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus? Instead, they emphasize to new converts that they are saved by grace and that their personal conduct will not influence their salvation.

Many years ago, I discussed this subject to a former pastor who was teaching at the Graduate School of Theology in Pasadena, California. He asked me, "Surely you don't try to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus?" I responded, "Of course I do!" He said, "Those aren't for Gentiles. Those are for the Jews!" I replied, "Please read the Great Commission. It says to make disciples of all nations. It says nothing of Jews. And it says to teach those people to obey all that Jesus commanded." He didn't respond.

The word antinomian is alluded to in various places in Scripture. In the King James Version, it is usually translated "iniquity," "wicked," "unrighteousness" or "transgressor."

To set the stage for how the word is used in Scripture, let's first look at Matthew 7:21 – one of the most important verses in all of Scripture:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'LORD, LORD,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *only* he who *does* the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Jesus just gave the ultimate requirement for salvation – ONLY those who *do* the will of his Father in heaven will enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the very next verse – Matthew 7:23 – people were arguing with Jesus at the judgment. He told them, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" The

latter part could properly be translated, "Away from me, you antinomians (or lawless ones)!"

Why did Jesus not know them? Why did he call them evildoers? Because they were lawless ones – those who called him LORD, but did not do what he commanded.

This passage is especially terrifying because the people arguing with Jesus at the judgment said to him, "LORD, LORD, did we not prophesy *in your name*, and *in your name* drive out demons and perform many miracles?" (Matthew 7:22).

Note these people called Jesus LORD and they prophesied and performed many miracles *in his name*!

These people likely thought they were super-Christians, because they were prophesying, driving out demons and performing miracles. Doubtless, they were convinced they were saved and heaven-bound. They were not! They were condemned. Why? Jesus told them: "Only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Throughout this book, I repeatedly emphasize that everything Jesus taught and commanded is *the will of his Father*. Everything Jesus said and did is what his Father told him to say and do; thus, it is the will of his Father in heaven.

Doubtless, those "super-Christians" who prophesied, drove out demons and performed miracles also claimed they were not under any law, because they were saved by grace. Likely, they also taught this popular heresy to others in their charge, perpetuating antinomianism in their followers.

In his book, *Paths to Power*, A.W. Tozer defined antinomianism this way.

"Fundamental Christianity in our times is deeply influenced by that ancient enemy of righteousness, antinomianism. The creed of the antinomian is

easily stated: We are saved by faith alone; works have no place in salvation; conduct is works, and is therefore of no importance. What we do cannot matter as long as we believe rightly. The divorce between creed and conduct is absolute and final. The question of sin is settled by the Cross; conduct is outside the circle of faith and cannot come between the believer and God. Such in brief, is the teaching of the antinomian.

"And so fully has it permeated the Fundamental element in modern Christianity that it is accepted by the religious masses as the very truth of God. Antinomianism is the doctrine of grace carried by uncorrected logic to the point of absurdity. It takes the teaching of justification by faith and twists it into deformity."

Tozer correctly defines antinomianism as concerning itself only with what one believes, not with one's actions. Contrary to what the antinomians claim, however, when the Bible speaks of the judgment of God, it is never based on what one believes. At Revelation 20:12-13, John described what he saw at the great white throne judgment:

"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. *The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.* The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and *each person was judged according to what he had done.*"

Speaking about the last days, Jesus said, "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person *according to what he has done*" (Matthew 16:27). Likewise, Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone *according to what he has done*" (Revelation 22:12).

Paul spoke of the same at Romans 2:5-6:

“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God will give to each person *according to what he has done.*” Paul wrote the Corinthians, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, *according to what he has done*, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

This certainly sounds like the very opposite of antinomi-
anism, doesn’t it? We are not judged according to what we believe, but according to what we have done.

Is there a way to reconcile being judged according to what we have done and what we believe? Yes, of course. Our conduct is the evidence of what we truly believe.

There are many more proofs, but you will see them later in this chapter as we continue to examine specific false teachings.

Conduct determines our relationship with Jesus. At Matthew 12:50 Jesus said, “Whoever *does the will of my Father in heaven* is my brother and sister and mother.” At John 15:14, Jesus said, “You are my friends *if you do what I command.*”

Do we have any chance of salvation if we are not a friend or brother or sister or mother of the LORD Jesus? Over and over again, Jesus emphasized the requirements of *doing* the will of God and *doing* what he commanded if we are to be saved.

Sin always seems to evolve into greater sin. Antinomi-
anism evolved into a doctrine that was prominent at the time of the Reformation and continues today in several denominations. Let’s look at this false teaching next.

Calvinism

Some Christian churches teach that before the creation of the world God predestined those who will be saved and those who will be damned. Those who follow such teachings emphasize the sovereignty of God and believe God sovereignly determined who will be saved long before any individual had an opportunity to accept or reject God's salvation through Jesus Christ. They also emphasize grace — God's unmerited favor — because in their view man does nothing, and can do nothing, to gain salvation.

A natural extension of that view is Calvinism's efficacious or "irresistible grace," doctrine, which is defined as that grace that reaches down from God and saves you, irrespective of your desire or intent; it is both irresistible and permanent. This arises, of course, from the belief that before the creation of the world God predestined who will be saved. If one is predestined by God to be saved, then he will be, no matter what his wishes are, no matter how he lives, no matter what. In their view, God exercises his sovereignty and saves those whom he chooses to save and damns those whom he chooses to damn.

But is this what Scripture says, or is this a creation of men who misinterpreted Scripture? Their motives could have been pure, or they could have been tainted by man's continuing desire not to be accountable. After all, if predestination is true, how can God hold anyone accountable? In their view, the reason a person is saved is not by anything he has done, but rather is dependent solely upon whether a sovereign God predestined him to be saved or damned. Make no mistake, these people claim that those predestined to be saved are irresistibly moved upon by the Holy Spirit and are brought to repentance and faith and made heirs of eternal life. They claim that only God initiates these actions and that man does nothing and is incapable of doing anything to receive or accept salvation.

Many of Christ's commands become irrelevant if one is predestined to be saved or to be damned. His command to make disciples of all nations is a nice idea, but it makes no

sense to try to make disciples of those who are predestined to be damned, nor is it really important to preach the gospel to those predestined to be saved because the sovereign God will make sure they are saved through "irresistible grace."

Faith, purity, righteousness, holiness and obedience all become desirable concepts under predestination, but are irrelevant to salvation. According to Calvinism, a person will not be saved if the Sovereign God has not predestined him to be saved; nothing anyone can do or wants to do – pro or con – will affect whether he is saved; ultimately, it is all dependent on God's election – God's predestination – of those who will be saved.

The concept of predestination must be understood before we examine the hypothesis that obedience is the necessary and natural response of a saving faith. If man is not accountable, then he need not be obedient because obedience would be irrelevant. According to the doctrine of predestination, if God has predestined a person to be saved, he will be saved regardless of his disobedience. Conversely, no matter how obedient he might be and how much he wants to be saved, he will be damned if God predestined him to be damned. The Calvinists defend that by claiming that if left to themselves men would continue in their state of rebellion and refuse all offers of salvation.

Calvinists had to find an explanation (or create one) for those who appeared to be in the faith, and who by all appearances had been devout believers, perhaps for many years, but then abandoned the faith. How can this be explained when Calvinism claims the person came to faith only by irresistible grace? They devised the concept of "evanescent grace," defined as grace that God temporarily gives to some people which causes them to believe they are saved, but which God later withdraws, damning them, because these people are not among those predestined to salvation. Is that the God you know, the God who wants everyone to come to repentance?

A major error of those advocating this false doctrine lies in

their confusion between predestination and foreknowledge. If God has predestined a person to be damned, then there is nothing that person can do to gain salvation – he will be damned.

On the other hand, if God foreknows those who will accept his gracious offer of salvation, he knows who will be saved, but has neither compelled nor forbidden them to be saved. They will be saved because they accepted God's gift of salvation on his terms – exactly what this book discusses.

The words "elect" and "chosen" are words Calvinists have taken to mean predestined. As we have observed before, Scripture explains itself. In this case, the explanation is found at 1 Peter 1:1-2:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's *elect*, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been *chosen* according to the *foreknowledge of God* the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Here we see those words again – "elect" and "chosen" – but not in the context of predestination, but "according to the *foreknowledge of God* the Father." WOW! This is very different from being predestined! And why were the elect chosen? For *obedience to Jesus Christ*! Doesn't that sound very much like Hebrews 5:9: "He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him"?

This leads us to Romans 8:29 where Scripture does speak of God's predestination, but not a predestination concerning who is saved and who is damned, but rather a predestined qualification for salvation:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29).

This verse tells us that God predestined that those who will be saved will be conformed to the likeness of his Son. Those who are not conformed to his likeness will not be saved.

There will be two groups of people at the judgment. The first group, those who will be saved, are all conformed to the likeness of the LORD Jesus, God's son. The second group of people, those who will be damned, are those who are not conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

What is the dominant characteristic of the LORD Jesus to which we can be conformed? It is obedience! Jesus modeled obedience for us by saying that *everything he said and everything he did is what his Father told him to say and do*. This is also something we are to do and something we can do.

As you will continue to see, obedience to God and to the LORD Jesus is the theme of Scripture. Thus, when we realize the correct word usage is "foreknowledge," not "predestination," we understand that God chose us through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, for obedience to the LORD Jesus (1 Peter 1:1).

I grew up attending a Presbyterian church on Sunday mornings, and a Reformed church on Sunday afternoons. I completed the advanced catechism of each church. Both taught Calvinism. I was 10 or 11 years old when I concluded that the doctrine of predestination is either wrong, or that it makes no difference how we live because we would be saved or damned irrespective of how we lived or what we wanted. I finally concluded Christianity was untrue, because I came to believe Calvinism's predestination was untrue. It was the beginning of a downward spiral. After the first semester of my second year in college, I abandoned my faith entirely. I spent the next 25 years without God – a lonely place full of sin and darkness. I vividly remember the day I renounced my belief in God and the truth of Scripture. I felt as if I were standing right

on the edge of a huge abyss. I couldn't see the bottom; it was dark and dangerous.

Do I believe in the grace of God? I feel as if I am living proof of the grace of God – it is only by God's grace that he took me back to be one of his beloved children.

Why is Calvinism so dangerous? First, it totally misrepresents the character of God. God is love! Yet, Calvinism shows him as arbitrary and capricious, damning many to hell and saving others without cause, without reference to anything they have done or not done. And, of course, many Calvinists become antinomians because they are taught that nothing they do will affect whether they are saved or not. Isn't it strange that they could reach such a conclusion when Scripture repeatedly stresses that we will be judged according to what we have done? (See Revelation 20:12-13.)

Predestination is incompatible with the teaching that Jesus died for **all**. How could he have died for those who have been predestined for damnation? The Calvinists answered this question by creating a doctrine that states that Jesus died only for the elect. But that doctrine is in conflict with the Scriptures.

Who does Scripture say Christ Jesus died for?

Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared *once for all* at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:26).

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all* (Hebrews 10:10).

For Christ died for sins *once for all*, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18).

Never does Scripture say that Jesus died only for a predestined elect. (See also Romans 6:10, Hebrews 7:27, 9:26, 10:2.)

Jesus died for **all**, just as stated in Scripture. His sacrifice is effective for **all** who will come to a saving faith, just as stated in Scripture. When we recognize that God knows who will be saved through his foreknowledge, not through predestination, there is neither conflict nor tension; instead, there is perfect harmony.

Calvin's doctrines are not the teachings of Scripture; Scripture teaches the opposite. Matthew 7:21 proves the utter falsity of this doctrine and antinomianism: "Not everyone who says to me, 'LORD, LORD,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*"

Calvinism's false roots spawned the popular doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security – a widely accepted false doctrine that does not overtly contain the doctrine of predestination, but has transformed it into something else, perhaps worse.

To see a far more in-depth discussion of Calvinism and proofs of its falsity, go to www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Calvinism. There you will find articles titled "Foreknowledge or Predestination," "Foreknowledge: Jacob and Essau," "The Doctrine of Predestination," "What a Sovereign LORD Cannot Do," "The Five Points of Calvinism Considered," "Words from a Second Century Christian," and "John Calvin's view of Reprobation."

Unconditional Eternal Security

What could be more appealing than being taught that you could gain eternal life in heaven by simply believing something to be true, and without it affecting your personal conduct? You could live as you wish, and be on your way to heaven. So it is with antinomianism.

Satan is the author of an “improved” version of antinomianism known as “Once-Saved, Always Saved,” or “Unconditional Eternal Security.” This new version of antinomianism removes any uncertainty of salvation that might exist for those who no longer appear to believe. It assures its adherents that if they once believed, their salvation is forever assured.

Adherents to this false doctrine emphasize that their salvation is by grace alone and that any form of works is an attempt to earn salvation. Interestingly, they are usually followers of Paul. Isn't it strange that they would follow Paul? After all, it was Paul who said he received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the *obedience* that comes from faith (Romans 1:5) ... so that all nations might believe and *obey* him (Romans 16:26). And it was Paul who described conduct that would prohibit a person who lives like that from inheriting the kingdom of God. We'll examine these teachings of Paul later.

To illustrate their beliefs accurately, I will quote from Dr. Charles Stanley, one of the best known proponents of unconditional eternal security, author of *Eternal Security Can You Be Sure?*² Dr. Stanley defines unconditional eternal security as “... that work of God in which He guarantees that the gift of salvation once received is possessed forever and cannot be lost.”³

In order to clearly understand the falsity of this doctrine, we'll look at various biblical teachings and compare each to the teachings of Dr. Stanley.

Jesus told John, “The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in

² Stanley, Charles, *Eternal Security Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1990),

³ Stanley, Charles, “Eternal Security What Do We Have To Lose?”, Tape #6, MI090.

the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 21:8). Paul wrote the Ephesians:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient (Ephesians 5:3-6).

By contrast, Dr. Stanley says:

"It is not lying, cheating, stealing, raping, murdering, or being unfaithful that sends people to hell."⁴

What Jesus told John and what Paul taught the Ephesians was the exact opposite of Dr. Stanley's claim. The writer to the Hebrews agrees with Jesus and Paul: God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral (Hebrews 13:4).

None of these Scriptures make any exceptions for those who claim to have once received the gift of salvation. According to Scripture, Paul wrote to the saints in Ephesus – he called them the faithful in Christ Jesus – warning them that if they did these things, they would not inherit the kingdom of Christ and of God. Wow! These people were Christians, yet Paul warned them against sin and the loss of salvation.

Notice Paul's warning at the end. "Let no one deceive you with empty words." Paul says it is because of such sins – immorality, impurity, or greed – that God's wrath comes on those who engage in them. Dr. Stanley, through the false doctrine of unconditional eternal security, is deceiving with

⁴ Ibid, p. 70.

empty words, just as Paul warned his readers. Dr. Stanley's assurances are the opposite of the repeated warnings of Scripture.

If the eternal security proponents were right, why did Jesus give the following warning?

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30).

Jesus says that wicked conduct – sin – caused by your eye or your hand will indeed cause your whole body to be thrown into hell. Jesus says it is better to cut off or gouge out the offending part of the body than to be thrown into hell.

However, Dr. Stanley writes:

But a man or woman who has been rescued once from a state of unforgiveness need not worry. For once 100 percent of a man's or woman's sins have been forgiven, the potential for being unforgiven has been done away with. The risk factor is zero. There are no more fires from which the believer needs to be saved.⁵

Dr. Stanley, and others who subscribe to the unconditional eternal security doctrine, will assure you that nothing you do after once having had faith will affect your salvation if you were once rescued from a state of unforgiveness.

According to Dr. Stanley, there are no sins that can affect your salvation – notwithstanding what Scripture says – regardless of Paul's warnings to the Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians about sins that would prevent those

⁵ Ibid, pages 79-80.

practicing those sins from inheriting the kingdom of God, and no matter that Jesus told the Apostle John (at Revelation 21:8) about sins that would cause people to be condemned to hell. According to Dr. Stanley, none of these scriptures pertain to those who follow the doctrine of unconditional eternal security if they once trusted in Jesus for forgiveness of sins and received the gift of salvation.

Perhaps one of Dr. Stanley's fundamental mistakes is that he claims that if a person once repents and his sins are forgiven, that forgiveness includes all sins that person will commit in the future. Once again, scripture provides the answer through Peter who defined the limit of repentance when he said, "... he has been cleansed from his *past* sins" (2 Peter 1:9).

Dr. Stanley went even further. He wrote:

"The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand."⁶ On other occasions he taught, "Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, his salvation is not in jeopardy"⁷ and "... believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation...."⁸ [Emphasis added.]

Did you notice how the above quote begins? "The Bible clearly teaches..." That statement sounds authoritative and sounds truthful, but it is a lie. That kind of statement can only be believed by those who do not know or study their Bible, are ignorant of the scriptures, and rely on teachers such as Dr. Stanley for their spiritual knowledge. How sad it is that they are betrayed by those, like Dr. Stanley – those who are in rebellion against God and the LORD Jesus and his teachings and commands.

⁶ Ibid, page 74.

⁷ Ibid, page 93.

⁸ Ibid, page 94.

What can be concluded by those who accept the doctrine of unconditional eternal security? Is adultery or any other sin a problem? Of course not. Why not? Because according to Dr. Stanley, if a person once received the gift of salvation and once was forgiven 100% of his/her sins, then all future sins have also been forgiven and he/she cannot lose their salvation. The sky is the limit! Anything goes! Party, be happy, your place in heaven is secure!

Is it any wonder why divorce is so rampant in churches that teach the unconditional eternal security doctrine? There is no reason whatsoever to accept the teachings of Jesus on the subject of adultery because the eternal security proponents assure them that no sins will send people to hell if they once trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. It doesn't matter if they continue in adultery. According to the eternal security proponents, the warnings about not inheriting the kingdom of God and being condemned to hell have nothing to do with the sins they commit.⁹

Dr. Stanley also claims:

“... God does not require a constant attitude of faith in order to be saved – only an act of faith.”¹⁰ He says, “It [saving faith] is a singular moment in time wherein we take what God has offered.”¹¹ He wrote: “Faithful or not, every person who has at any time had saving faith is a permanent part of the body of Christ.”¹²

Scripture, however, has a very different message. It emphasizes that it is continued faith and faithfulness that count. The idea of a one-time commitment that saves

⁹ For a more complete discussion refuting the doctrine of unconditional eternal security, see the website www.bereanpublishers.co.nz, False doctrines, “Is the Believer Eternally Secure?”

¹⁰ Supra 6, p. 80

¹¹ Ibid, page 81.

¹² Ibid, page 94.

forever is false. Consider Paul's warning to the Corinthians:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, **if** you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

The above scripture is especially important. Paul calls the Corinthians "brothers," acknowledges that they received the gospel and that they took their stand on it, and are saved **if** they hold firmly to it. What if they don't hold firmly to it? Paul warns they will have believed in vain.

Likewise, Paul warned the Colossians:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — **if** you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (Colossians 1:21-23. See also James 1:12).

The above is Paul's summary of the gospel, of which he became a servant. You will be presented to God, holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation, provided – the **if** – you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. God requires much from those he delivers from the kingdom of darkness into his glorious light. The reward for their faithfulness and obedience will be an inheritance in the kingdom of God, instead of being cast into the fiery lake of burning sulphur.

In Hebrews Chapter 10, the writer exhorts readers to persevere in their faith, exactly as Paul exhorted them to do in the prior scriptures:

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.³⁷ For in just a very little while,

“He who is coming will come and will not delay.
³⁸But my righteous one will live by faith.
And if he shrinks back,
I will not be pleased with him.”

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved (Hebrews 10:35-39).

In verse 36, the writer urges perseverance so that *when you have done the will of God* you will receive what God has promised – salvation. Do you see the similarity between this verse and Matthew 7:21, “Only *those who do the will of my Father* in heaven will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Verse 38 says that God will not be pleased if they shrink back, but in verse 39, it says: “We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed.” Sadly, destruction is the fate of those who do not persevere in their faith and who do not remain established and firm – fixed on the hope held out in the gospel (Colossians 1:23).

Jesus emphasized the need to persevere: “All men will hate you because of me, but *he who stands firm to the end will be saved*” (Matthew 10:22) and “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but *he who stands firm to the end will be saved*” (Matthew 24:12-13).

Dr. Stanley also claims, “... we are presented with a Christian who at no point in his entire life bore any eternal

fruit. And yet his salvation is never jeopardized”¹³ and “... there are Christians who show no evidence of their Christianity as well.”¹⁴

Jesus refuted such claims at John 15:1-6:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. *He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit ... If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.* (John 15:1-2, 6).

Where was the branch that was cut off? It was in the vine – in Jesus! The branch refers to people who started in Christ, but did not produce fruit. Branches that bear no fruit are cut off from Jesus by God the Father. What happens to the branches that are cut off – those that do not remain in Jesus? They are thrown away and wither, then picked up and thrown into the fire and burned.

This was not Jesus’ only teaching on the necessity of producing good fruit. At Matthew 7:17-19, Jesus said, “Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ^oA good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Once again the requirement is to produce good fruit or be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Jesus told another parable illustrating the same point:

“A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

¹³ Ibid, page 121.

¹⁴ Ibid, page 71.

“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down’” (Luke 13:6-9).

Once again, the issue is about producing fruit. Remember, this is a fig tree planted in God’s vineyard. In this case, there simply wasn’t any fruit so God told Jesus to cut down the tree. Jesus interceded, asking for more time, but agreed that if the tree did not produce fruit in the next year, it should be cut down.

These parables speak of punishment and damnation for those who have not produced fruit – those who don’t use what has been given to them by God to produce gain for the Kingdom.

In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-8, Mark 4:3-8, and Luke 8:5-8), the seed was sown on four kinds of soil. Only one of the soils produced a crop. Jesus explained: “The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:23). The true believer perseveres and produces fruit, or a crop, according to what God has given him to do.

What about the other three soils? Two of those are important to consider; the first is not. Jesus likened the first soil – the seed sown on the path – to a person who hears the message but does not understand it; the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart (Matthew 13:19). The second, the seed sown on rocky soil, represents a person who hears the word and receives it with joy and becomes a new believer. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away (Matthew 13:20-21). He didn’t persevere. The third soil is one where the seed was sown among thorns. He also hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).

Of the four soils that received the seed, only one persevered and produced fruit. The second and third, though they received the seed — heard and accepted the word — failed to persevere and produce fruit.

The foregoing scriptures show that bearing fruit for the kingdom is of eternal importance. We can lose our salvation if we failed or refused to do those good works God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). That is a form of rebellion against God.

Why would works, fruit and obedience be so important to God that we will lose our salvation if we fail to do what he requires of us? It is because works, fruit and obedience are the *evidence* of our faith. We will be judged by God *according to what we have done* – by our fruits, works and obedience (Revelation 20:12-15).

Dr. Stanley says, "We are presented with a Christian who at no point in his entire life bore any eternal fruit. And yet his salvation is never jeopardized." Is that what you just read in the preceding scriptures? In ALL the scriptures mentioned above, the lack of fruit (or producing bad fruit) resulted in being cut off, or the tree was cut down, or the branch was cut off the vine and thrown into the fire and burned. All these examples show condemnation for those who do not produce fruit.

It is my experience that churches that preach these false doctrines do not teach that Jesus must be LORD in the lives of all those who will be saved. That is to be expected, isn't it? It is an oxymoron to claim Jesus as LORD and not obey him. But the requirement of obedience is foreign to the antinomian.

It should be overwhelmingly clear now why the false doctrine of unconditional eternal security is so dangerous. The adherents to this doctrine falsely believe they can never lose their salvation – salvation that they likely didn't have in the first place. This makes it almost impossible to reach them with the truth of the gospel.

When we review some of the teachings and commands of Jesus in Chapter 3, you will find many scriptures that disprove the false doctrine of unconditional eternal security.

Easy Believism

People come to church to find the Jesus in whom they can believe to have salvation. Far too often the church tells them about another Jesus.

That's what happened to me as an adult. I don't think the people at the church deliberately misled me; they didn't intentionally take me to the wrong Jesus. They didn't know to lead me to the Jesus of Scripture. Only through personal Bible study did I discover and receive the Jesus revealed in Scripture. When I received him as my LORD and promised to obey him, the Holy Spirit flooded me with the fruit of the Spirit.

You may ask, "Is it possible to believe in a 'wrong' Jesus?" Yes, indeed! Jesus warned about such a danger when he said, "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24).

To respond to Jesus' warning, we must do two things. The first is to make sure we know *who* Jesus claims to be and then to *believe* that he is who he claims to be.

At John 3:16 we read that "... whoever *believes in him* shall not perish but have everlasting life." It is critical to know who the "him" is in order to not perish and have everlasting life. The other critical word in the phrase is "believes."

The easy believism so prevalent in America, and the many countries to which it has spread, glosses over the true meanings of "believes" and "him." Perhaps it is because

they so grossly over-simplify what is required for salvation that their false doctrine is called "easy believism."

When the angel announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, he proclaimed, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the LORD" (Luke 2:11). Perhaps as a result of that proclamation, the proponents of easy believism say we must only accept Jesus as our Savior in order to have eternal life, though that is never – not once – stated in Scripture. As noted before, there is no reference in Scripture to accepting, receiving or believing in Jesus as one's Savior (or personal Savior) in order to be saved.

Perhaps the greatest surprise to me is that easy believism exists within much of the traditional and evangelical Protestant church today. The danger is great because it seems this heresy has gone unnoticed by most and only a few seem aware of the false teaching about Jesus that has permeated the church. Even fewer seem willing to come forward to expose this heresy.

One of the greatest dangers of this heresy is that it sounds right to many people who are not well read in Scripture.

You might often hear this statement in your church or from a televangelist: "If you accept Jesus as your personal Savior, you will have eternal life." That sounds truthful to many people. I've asked groups of people to raise their hands if they believe that is true. Most raise their hands. Yes, it might sound right, but it is wrong! This statement or anything like it is not found in Scripture. The danger is compounded because we hear this heresy coming from highly regarded preachers and teachers in the Christian community.

Back in 1994, I sometimes met with the senior pastor of a large church in our area. I knew he subscribed to the false doctrine of unconditional eternal security, but seldom spoke about it in his sermons. I earnestly contended with him about this issue, urging him to disavow this teaching that is

so dangerous for his congregants. He turned to me and said, "I'd be fired in a minute if I did that!"

Such heresies are not new. Even in the days of the apostles, efforts were made to pervert the gospel by teaching a different Jesus. In the days of the Apostle John, the Gnostics were teaching a different Jesus, which John condemned.

But we're concerned about present-day heresy. Peter prophesied about a *future time* when there will be false teachers who will *secretly introduce destructive heresies* that even deny the *sovereign LORD* who bought them (2 Peter 2:1). Peter warned that many will follow their shameful ways and bring the truth into disrepute (2 Peter 2:2).

Peter's prophecy is fulfilled in our time. Mormons are one of the fastest growing sects in the world; the Jehovah's Witnesses are growing rapidly; the Roman Catholic Church continues to gain ground. These sects present Jesus, but a *different* Jesus – not the Jesus presented in Scripture. Each fulfills Peter's prophecy of false teachers denying the Sovereign LORD who bought them. But those are the danger without.

Now let's look at the danger within. An even more dangerous heresy is in traditional and evangelical Protestantism. The most destructive fact about this heresy is that it gives a false assurance of salvation to millions. Consider the multitudes who believe that they have salvation because they "believe in Jesus as their Savior" or because they "believe that Jesus died for their sins on the cross."

The harm to the church body is severe. When I hear about a high-profile Christian leader who fell morally in a way that brings disrepute to the body of Christ, I suspect he really didn't know or believe in the LORD Jesus of Scripture. On a lesser-known level are the millions of people who claim to be Christians, but live like the world and do not profess Jesus as LORD.

Peter's prophecy said such false teachers will deny the *LORD*. Indeed, as we saw earlier in this chapter, God insists we receive his Son as our LORD if we would be saved. Yet the easy believism proponents deny the need for Jesus to be LORD and often actively oppose it, sometimes claiming that doing so would be an attempt to add to the finished work of Christ on the cross. Others sometimes falsely claim that the first and only necessary step to gain salvation is to accept Jesus as Savior. They say that those who want a "deeper walk" may later receive Jesus as their LORD. The truth, as I've already stressed several times, is that salvation is only for those who receive Jesus as their LORD.

Peter prophesied that many will follow the heresy. It is probable that the majority of churches teach this false doctrine today. Peter said the false teachers will bring the truth into disrepute. Haven't they done so? Professing Christians are often indistinguishable from non-believers. One of the first objections from non-believers about Christianity is often that the church is full of hypocrites.

The following table shows the number of times each title is used of Jesus:

LORD	618
Christ	543
Son of Man	84
Teacher	42
Son of God	37
King	35
Lamb	32
Savior	15
Prophet	15
Master	11
High Priest	7

The titles God gave Jesus in the New Testament describe the roles in which God wants us to know Jesus. As we look at the frequency of their use, let's ask ourselves if God's repetition is intentional.

Do those numbers surprise you? They surprised me! There is an enormous difference in the number of times the titles are repeated. Does God intentionally use repetition for emphasis? Given the frequency of use of the titles used to describe Jesus, is there any question in your mind that two of the titles assume an overwhelming importance?

Even more convincing to me is the number of books in the New Testament that have no mention of Jesus as Savior. Eighteen books in the New Testament don't use the title *Savior* for Jesus, including two of the four Gospels, neither does Romans or Colossians (sometimes called the theological books of the New Testament), 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, nor 1 Timothy. Galatians does not use the title *Savior*, neither does Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude nor Revelation.

Is it conceivable that if salvation could be gained by accepting (or believing or receiving or having faith in) Jesus as Savior in order to have salvation, that God would have omitted that particular title from most of the New Testament? Or that God would have used the title *LORD* 41 times as often, or the title *Christ* more than 36 times as often as the title *Savior*, or that God would use other titles – *Son of Man*, *Teacher*, *Son of God*, *King*, and *Lamb* – each more than twice as often as *Savior* if our salvation is supposed to be in Jesus as *Savior*? The resounding answer must be NO! It isn't conceivable.

I believe that every word used in the original transcripts of Scripture is exactly what God intended. If you agree with that statement, then even without additional evidence, the minimal use of the title *Savior* should cause us to skeptically examine claims that the way to be saved is by believing in Jesus as *Savior*.

Those who accept easy believism often respond differently than God intends. They might respond with *gratitude* to Jesus as Savior, but fail to respond to Jesus as LORD with the *obedience* that comes from faith (Romans 1:5). We have seen that obedience is an essential element of a Saving Faith.

My book *SAVING FAITH* has substantially more information regarding these issues, including more details regarding the titles of Jesus. Visit www.bereanpublishers.com | Book: *Saving Faith*.

In Chapter 3, we will examine various teachings and commands of Jesus. You will find they utterly discredit the false doctrines discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3

Jesus' Teachings and Commands

Introduction

The Apostle John gave us many valuable tests for us to determine whether or not we have salvation and how to be assured of our salvation. Have you noticed that many of John's tests are related to obedience?

John says, "This is love for God: to obey his commands" (1 John 5:3). What are God's commands that we are to obey in order to show our love for God?

The four Gospels include more than 300 teachings and commands of Jesus, many of which state they must be obeyed or a person will not gain salvation; or the inverse, a warning that if a person continues in certain sins he will not be saved. We will review some of these teachings and commands and hope they will motivate you to do your own in-depth study. Later I will show you a simple method to accomplish this.

Scripture says that God does not lie (see 1 Samuel 15:29, Titus 1:2). God says you will not be saved if you continue in sin and that if you do not do his will you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Remember, God does not lie, so believe it! Paul wrote Timothy:

If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our LORD Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

The teachings and commands of Jesus are not idle scriptures. They must be understood and believed in order to understand the seriousness of what God requires for salvation. While God is a God of love – his very nature – he is also a God of justice and righteousness. It is not

without reason that Jesus told us: "I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him" (Luke 12:5).

It should be obvious that we can have assurance of salvation only when we satisfy God's requirements.

The term, "God's requirements" for salvation might cause a firestorm of opposition from those who claim salvation is all by grace because they believe there are no requirements. I'm willing to face that firestorm, and you will, too, after you read the following requirements directly from the words of Jesus – the incarnate Word of God – who taught and commanded these teachings and commands as they were given to him by God the Father.

Always be mindful of the fundamental truths – the most fundamental being that all our knowledge about salvation comes from the Scripture. It is Scripture alone that reveals God's plan to reconcile people to himself through the sacrifice of his Son on the cross (Colossians 1:21-22). It is Scripture that says that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, that no man comes to the Father (God) except through him (John 14:6). It is Scripture that says we must stand firm to the end to be saved. It is Scripture that says only those who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21).

Also, remember that all of Jesus' commands stand on their own. Most commands that we will examine in this chapter will concern salvation issues that must be obeyed or salvation will be forfeited – most arising from the express commands and teachings of our LORD Jesus. We must obey all these commands. Obedience is not grading on the curve, nor is it hoping we can obey most of them. Almost certainly, it will be difficult to obey all of them at first, no matter how hard we try. This is when we must revert to obeying Jesus' first command – to repent – to express to God our sorrow for violating his righteous requirements. We must sincerely confess our failure to God, ask for

forgiveness and for the power and ability through the Holy Spirit to do what is right in the future.

To say obedience and good works are part of (come from) a saving faith may cause many to convulse in horror, claiming that I am advocating salvation by works. (See Romans 1:5 and Ephesians 2:10.) Such people are terribly mistaken. James said, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:26). At 2:17 he said again, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." Does anyone claim that a dead faith will save?

As we review these teachings and commands, we will revisit scriptures from earlier chapters. We all need repetition in order to remember better. Peter said:

"I plan to keep on reminding you of these things — even though you already know them and are standing firm in the truth. ¹³ Yes, I believe I should keep on reminding you of these things as long as I live. ¹⁴ But the Lord Jesus Christ has shown me that my days here on earth are numbered and I am soon to die. ¹⁵ So I will work hard to make these things clear to you. I want you to remember them long after I am gone" (2 Peter 1:12-15).

We Must Repent of Our Sin

Jesus' first command was to repent: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:15). We know we must repent if we would be saved simply because Jesus commanded it and it is the will of the Father (see Matthew 7:21).

Repentance involves turning from sin and turning to God. It also involves acknowledging (confessing) sin – the breaking of God's commands – and pledging to God that you will turn from that sin and obey him.

To better explain God's view of repentance, Jesus told this parable:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'
¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'
¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14).

How different God's standards are! Jesus said the proud religious leader was rejected; the humble tax collector was justified before God.

Let's use a present-day example of how this scripture can be applied. Suppose we see a former drug addict who claims to have come to the LORD, but is obviously using drugs again. We might make self-righteous assumptions about him. But the addict goes home, falls on his face before the LORD, begs for his forgiveness and pleads for his help and strength to overcome this addiction.

Who is righteous before God? You and I with our self-righteous comments, or the drug addict? I suggest it is the drug addict who humbly begs forgiveness, confessing his weakness.

Repentance became an explicit salvation issue when Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:3,5).

Repentance is considered the first step for those who would become followers of Jesus. Scripture says we cannot continue in sin and be a follower of Jesus.

Repentance is not a one-time act. When we repent, we are forgiven for those sins we repent of – our past sins. At 2 Peter 1:9, Peter explained, "... he has been cleansed from his past sins." If/when we sin in the future, we must quickly repent again by turning away from that sin and turning to God.

When we quickly repent of sin we are again holy in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation (Colossians 1:22). Then, and only then, we can freely experience God's love for us, our love for him and the assurance of salvation.

Is God reluctant to forgive us when we've repented over and over again for the same sin? I found the answer when I was doing just that. It was a time in our marriage where I was using a harsh tone toward my wife Dar. For a long time, I couldn't detect that. But Dar has a sensitive spirit and was readily crushed. I didn't want to continue this behavior, so I asked Dar and the LORD for forgiveness. I asked the LORD to help me recognize what I was doing and to help me to stop doing it.

Sadly, I had no more finished repenting when I spoke harshly to Dar again. This time, I felt unworthy to be forgiven, either by Dar or God. I couldn't forgive myself and became depressed over it. The next day, we were in church singing praise songs. While my eyes were shut, I was startled to see the LORD walking toward me. I didn't want to look at him because I knew the look of disapproval he would have on his face. But I finally did look at him and was astonished to feel incredible love coming from him. Tears streamed down my face.

What about those who deliberately continue in sin? At Hebrews 10:26-27, we learn, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

There is no assurance of salvation for those who continue in sin, but the promise of eternal life for those who humbly repent of their sin and turn to the LORD.

We Must Believe In Him

Among Christians, the most famous Bible verse of all time is likely John 3:16. Let's look at this verse in its context:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned* already because he has not believed in the name of God's only begotten Son (John 3:16-18).

While John 3:16 promises eternal life for those who believe in God's Son, John 3:18 tells us that those who do not believe already stand condemned because they have not believed. Thus, believing in God's Son is a salvation issue.

This is confirmed 20 verses later at John 3:36: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for *God's wrath remains on him.*"

This is further corroborated at John 5:24 where Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." How can "hears my word" and "believes him who sent me" be reconciled? Easy. Everything Jesus said is what God his Father told him to say. Thus, to believe what Jesus said, is to believe God the Father.

The Jews asked Jesus what they must do to do the works God requires. He responded, "The work of God is this: to

believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). Who had God sent? It was his Son, the LORD Jesus.

These verses confirm that we must believe in the Son, the LORD Jesus, to have eternal life. Those who do not believe stand condemned.

To believe in the Son is not mere mental assent or an agreement that Jesus is the Son of God. No, it is to believe in everything he *is* – the LORD Jesus, the King of kings and the LORD of lords, to believe in everything he said, and to obey his teachings and commands. That is the multifaceted faith that is required for salvation and those who have that faith have both salvation and the assurance of salvation.

We Must Do the Will of God

One of the most basic of all the teachings of Jesus regarding salvation is found at Matthew 7:21. This scripture virtually encompasses all that is required to enter the kingdom of heaven:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'LORD, LORD,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven."

Simply calling Jesus "LORD" will not cause one to be saved. It requires obedience to and doing the will of God in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

This immediately raises questions: "What is the will of God that I must do to be saved?" "Does it include everything in the Bible?" "Must I follow the Old Testament rules, regulations and commands given through Moses?" As we would expect, God's word answers these questions through the teachings and commands of our LORD Jesus.

Let's first tackle the critically important question – "What is the will of God that we are to obey?"

Jesus said that *everything* he did and said was what his Father told him to do and say (John 8:28, 12:49-50, 14:10, 14:24, 14:31). Thus, *everything Jesus said and did is the will of God.*

We have seen that salvation is only for those who *do* the will of God. We know that everything Jesus taught and commanded is the will of God. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the book of Hebrews states, "He [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:9). Why was he the source of salvation? Because he revealed God's will to men; because only those who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Paul understood the necessity of obedience to Jesus, saying, "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Now let's answer the last two questions – "What are we to obey?" and "Are we to obey the commands, rules and regulations of the Old Testament?"

Concerning the first question – "What are we to obey?" – Jesus gave the great commission to his disciples at Matthew 28:19-20:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*"

Jesus said we are to obey *everything he commanded* during his ministry on earth. Why would he command them to teach new disciples everything he commanded? Again, because Jesus taught and commanded the will of God.

Jesus gave us a simple command to make disciples of all nations, followed by two specific things we are to do to make those people into disciples: (1) baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and

(2) *teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded.* Not only are we to obey everything he commanded, but we are to teach new believers to obey his commands.

What about the Old Testament? God canceled the written code and its regulations that stood against us. He nailed it to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

Is the Christian no longer under law? Not under the Old Testament Law. The Old Testament Law of Moses has been replaced with the teachings and commands of Jesus – the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). Paul understood this, saying, “I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law” (1 Cor. 9:21).

The teachings and commands of Jesus are not only the “law of Christ” but are also the GOSPEL. It is no accident that the first four books of the Bible have traditionally been called the Gospels – they contain the teachings and commands of Jesus.

The word gospel means “Good News.” The teachings and commands of Jesus reveal how we can be reconciled to God, how we can please him through our love and obedience, how to avoid his wrath, and how to gain eternal life. What can be better news and more loving than that?

We see that the will of God is the gospel of our LORD Jesus – his teachings and commands – which we must obey in order to do the will of our Father in heaven. What happens to those who refuse to obey?

Paul said:

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our LORD Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the LORD and from the majesty of his power (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

Is obedience to the gospel of our LORD Jesus – his teachings and commands – a salvation issue? Indeed it is!

Those who do not obey will be *punished with everlasting destruction* and shut out from the presence of the LORD and from the majesty of his power.

We have learned there is neither salvation, nor the assurance of salvation, for those who do not do the will of our Father who is in heaven and that the will of God for New Testament believers is obedience to the gospel of our LORD Jesus – his teachings and commands.

Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is that we are to love the LORD our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind (Luke 10:27). Remember John's definition of love for God: "... to obey his commandments" (1 John 5:3). The combination of these two verses demonstrates that the first and greatest commandment is that we are to love the LORD our God *by obeying his commandments* with all our heart, soul, strength and mind.

Those who obey have both salvation and the assurance of salvation.

We Must Be Righteous

Jesus warned, "I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, *you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:20).

This is obviously a salvation issue. We must understand what this means if we are to fulfill this requirement.

The first task is to determine what it means to be righteous. John defines it for us:

"Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who *does what is right is righteous*, just as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

It is that simple. Those who do what is right are righteous! Jesus did what was right and he is righteous. What did Jesus do that made him righteous? He said and did everything God his Father told him to say and do. And that is what we are commanded to do – the will of our Father in heaven, because only those who do his will are allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21).

There is a false doctrine that says that we cannot have righteousness of our own, that the only righteousness we can have is imputed righteousness, meaning that Jesus' righteousness is imputed to us.

However, the righteousness described at 1 John 3:7 has to do with our conduct – doing what is right – not imputed righteousness. In order to be righteous we must *do* what is right.

Did you notice how doing the will of the Father and having righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees are related? Our righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law when we do the will of our Father who is in heaven. The Pharisees rejected Jesus and his words. Thus, the Pharisees did not do the will of the Father; they did not do what was right; they were wicked.

Is righteousness important to God? Evidently, it is extremely important. Jesus gave it first priority when he said, "But seek *first* his kingdom and his *righteousness* ..." (Matthew 6:33).

God has promised special blessings for the righteous: "the eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12).

When we obey the teachings and commands of Jesus we *do what is right* – we are righteous. The righteous have salvation and the assurance of salvation.

We Must Not Be Wicked

Jesus taught a parable that demonstrates another principle of the kingdom of heaven:

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:47-50).

Where are the wicked thrown? Into the fiery furnace – where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth! That is condemnation to hell.

Jesus told a parallel parable that confirmed this kingdom principle. The parable was about weeds growing in a field of wheat (Matthew 13:24-30). Jesus explained the parable at Matthew 13:37-43:

“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

We need to note several important points and definitions in this parable. The weeds are the sons of the evil one – those who do evil (the wicked and sinful). What happens to those who are evil? Just like in the previous parable, the wicked are thrown into the fiery furnace – into hell – where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Today, there seems to be very little preaching and teaching about sin and what is wicked in the sight of God. Paul enumerated conduct that is wicked. He asked: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

John made clear the origin of sinful actions: “*He who does what is sinful is of the devil*, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work ... ¹⁰This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: *Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.*” (1 John 3:8,10). John just said that anyone who is not righteous is not a child of God, but a child of the devil.

While Paul specified certain wicked conduct, John gave us an all-encompassing definition. A sinful or wicked person is *anyone who does not do what is right*. It is the opposite of the definition of the righteous person: *He who does what is right is righteous*. Both are defined in terms of “doing what is right.” The wicked *do not do* what is right; the righteous *do* what is right. By that definition, everything can be evaluated as being righteous or wicked.

Based on the above scriptures, how will we be judged by God? The answer is found at Revelation 20:12-13. Note specifically how we will be judged:

The dead were judged *according to what they had done* as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged *according to what he had done*.

God will judge whether “what they had done” was righteous or wicked.

This brings us to the next question, “What is right?” The answer is simple, and likely you know by now. Jesus’ commands and teachings are right. Each of them is right! Each teaching and each command is the will of God. When we obey the teachings and commands of Jesus we do what is right. If we disobey them, we do what is wrong.

We can rightly conclude that those who obey Jesus’ teachings and commands do what is right and are righteous. Those who do not obey Jesus’ teachings and commands do not do what is right and are wicked.

Once again, we come full circle to the fundamental requirement that we must obey the teachings and commands of Jesus if we would be righteous and be saved. In doing so, we also have the assurance of salvation.

We Must Not Sin

Jesus spoke about the importance of not sinning by using graphic examples:

“If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell” (Matthew 18:8-9).

How extreme! Would we consider cutting off our hand or foot, or gouging out our eye because of sin? The point here is that our hand, or foot or eye does not cause us to sin; instead it is evil or sinful desires that cause us to use a hand or foot or eye while committing a sin.

More easily understood is sinning with our eyes. People use their eyes to view erotic and sexually stimulating pictures, videos, movies, TV programs and outright pornography. The purpose of these images is to promote lust that Jesus says is the equivalent of adultery. Paul warns that no adulterer will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Jesus warns that those who sin will be thrown into eternal fire – the fire of hell.

Does that mean we are all condemned, because we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? (See Romans 3:23.) No, but it does mean we must immediately repent – ask for forgiveness and turn from the sin. Some sins are vexing, habitual and hard to break. We must simply turn to God in humility, confess our failure and seek his power to break the curse of the sin that entangles us (Hebrews 12:1), knowing that Jesus died to free us from slavery to sin.

Although we will sin from time to time, we must not continue in sin. Over and over, we are warned that those who continue in sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. (See 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-7; and Colossians 3:5.)

We must always remember that *we will be judged according to what we have done!* (Rev. 20:11-15.) Those who do what is right (the righteous) have salvation; those who do not do what is right (the wicked) are condemned.

To the extent possible, we must strive to be free from sin out of love for our Father and the LORD Jesus. We know that sin is so heinous in God's eyes that our LORD Jesus had to die on a cross to free us from slavery to sin; it is his

blood that washes us clean from the stain of sin. What a heart of love our Father and the LORD Jesus have that they would pay such a price to reconcile us to themselves.

When we do what is right we can have the assurance of salvation.

We Must Persevere to be Saved

Jesus said, "All men will hate you because of me, but *he who stands firm to the end will be saved*" (Matthew 10:22, Mark 13:13). When Jesus told his disciples about the end times, he said, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but *he who stands firm to the end will be saved*" (Matthew 24:13).

At Hebrews 10:35-36 we read:

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ³⁶*You need to persevere* so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Again at Luke 21:19: "*By standing firm you will gain life.*" There are 33 verses in Scripture that exhort us to stand firm.

Paul spoke of the same need for perseverance at Colossians 1:21-23:

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he [God] has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ ***if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.***"

God reconciled us by Christ's physical body through death. Why? To present us holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. Isn't that wonderful? Yes, and it is true! But there's a conditional requirement: "**If you continue in your faith**, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel."

These scriptures imply that if you do not stand firm or continue in your faith you will not be saved; you will not be holy in his sight or without blemish or free from accusation.

Now let's look at another scripture that speaks decisively about the need to persevere and what happens when you do not:

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, **if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain**" (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

There is no ambiguity in these verses. Paul's letter was addressed to "The church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our LORD Jesus Christ – their LORD and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Paul calls these people "brothers" and acknowledged that they had received Jesus as LORD and taken their stand on the gospel Paul preached to them. He assures them, "By this gospel you are saved." But then he continues, "**If you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.**"

There's no doubt about what Paul meant: If they do not hold firmly to the word he preached to them, they have believed in vain. What they believed would be for naught. If they did not hold firmly to the gospel they had received, they would be lost, not saved.

Peter taught the same:

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, *they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.* ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²² Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud" (2 Peter 2:20-22).

Peter speaks about those who have come to know our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ, but are once again entangled in the corruption of the world and overcome. *They are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.*

This is a grim scripture. It describes people who received the LORD Jesus and began to follow him, but once again became entangled in the world, and were overcome. Not only did these people not persevere and are spiritually lost, but also will be punished more severely than if they had never known the way of salvation.

The frightening aspect is that these people who did not persevere once regarded themselves as Christians and actually were believers. But they abandoned their faith and lost their salvation.

There is neither assurance of salvation nor salvation for those who do not persevere in their faith.

We Must Forgive

Jesus began his teaching on forgiveness when he taught us what we know as "The LORD's Prayer." He taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us*" (Matthew 6:12).

Did you notice the conditional portion of this scripture? We are to ask to be forgiven only *as we have forgiven others*. That condition can also be understood as follows: We ask to be forgiven only *to the extent we have forgiven others*. Or it could be stated: We ask to be forgiven *in the same manner as we have forgiven others*.

The implication is that if we won't or haven't forgiven others, God will not forgive us. Or, stated another way, God will forgive us in the same manner, or to the same extent, as we forgive others.

The next verses show that it is clearly stated – more than just implied – by the LORD Jesus: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, *your Father will not forgive your sins*” (Matthew 6:14-15).

Can we have salvation and enter the kingdom of heaven if our sins are not forgiven? At Revelation 21:8, Jesus told John: “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.” This definition should cover everyone whose sins are not forgiven. Then Jesus told John about those who will never enter heaven: “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27). Anyone whose sins are not forgiven is impure; he remains stained by sin.

Lest we miss the point, Jesus told a frightening parable that makes crystal clear what happens when we do not forgive.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold

to repay the debt.

²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.'³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:23-35).

We know we're dealing with kingdom principles by how the parable begins, "The kingdom of heaven is like a king...". As the parable progresses, we realize the subject is forgiveness.

The servant owes the king a vast sum that he is unable to repay, just as we cannot repay God for the sins we have committed. There is nothing we can do to make our sins go away in God's sight, except to accept the gift of God's forgiveness through our LORD Jesus, available to us only because Jesus shed his blood on the cross in order to reconcile us to God and to free us from slavery to sin. This truth is exemplified in this parable. The king (God) completely forgave the servant's debt.

But the forgiven servant went to another servant who owed him a small amount and demanded payment. The debtor servant begged for patience, promising to pay, but the forgiven servant had his debtor thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. Obviously, the mercy of the king had not rubbed off on the forgiven servant. The forgiven servant had no mercy on his fellow servant.

When the other servants told the king about this great injustice, the king called in the forgiven servant. He called him a "wicked" servant, reminding him that he had canceled all his debt because he begged to be forgiven. The king asked, "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had on you?"

Then we learn the moral of the parable. The king turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed. But wait! Didn't the king forgive all his debt? Yes, he had, but because the servant would not forgive his fellow servant *all that debt was reinstated!* If he couldn't repay his debt before, he surely could never repay it while being tortured in jail.

Then, lest we missed the lesson, Jesus stated it for us: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (Matthew 13:35).

Should we try to split hairs and say we that we only need to forgive someone who asks to be forgiven? Would you put salvation on the line over such a question? Jesus said you will be condemned if you do not forgive your brother from the heart. He didn't say to forgive only if someone asks to be forgiven. There may be many situations in which a person can't ask to be forgiven (the person died, for example), or perhaps he didn't even know he had sinned against you.

FORGIVE! Do it in every case and immediately. Never hold a grudge or unforgiveness against anyone for any reason.

The first part of Jesus' teaching in this parable is about what God requires – total and immediate forgiveness of our brothers if we wish to be totally and immediately forgiven by God. We see in the second part of this parable just how serious the consequences are for disobedience. We will be condemned to be tortured until we repay a debt we can never repay.

If you hold any unforgiveness toward your brother, you will not be saved until you totally forgive. Until then, you can have no assurance of salvation. Both salvation and the assurance of salvation are conditioned upon us forgiving our brothers from our heart.

There is one other distinction we must not miss in the parable of the debtors. Jesus requires that we forgive brothers; Jesus defined "brothers" as all those who do the will of our Father in heaven.

But the teaching at Matthew 6:14-15 speaks only of "men," whether you forgive *men* or whether you do not forgive *men*. This teaching refers to all others – brothers or not. What's the bottom line? We must immediately forgive **all** others **all** the time. Then, and only then, we can have both salvation and the continuing assurance of salvation.

We must not miss the great blessings that flow from this command. The person who freely forgives holds no root of bitterness. He is open and loving even toward those who have offended him. He does not live with anger or tension or bitterness, but with love. Aren't God's commands wonderful?

Some may find this very hard. They've been badly hurt. Their hurt may be mixed with anger, wondering where God was when this happened to them. If you're feeling that way, it is time to have a heart-to-heart talk with God. Tell him how you're feeling. Share the anger and bitterness you feel at the pain you've suffered. Then ask him to comfort and heal you. Remind him that he is the friend that is always with you, that you rely on him for all things. Now you need him to help you forgive from your heart,

take away the anger and bitterness and totally forgive in obedience to his command.

Forgive! Do it in every case and immediately. Do it without thinking about it. Make it a habit of life. Never hold a grudge or unforgiveness against anyone for any reason. Obedience is a matter of the will. It has nothing to do with whether you feel like it or not. Forgiveness is the will of God for all believers.

We Must Bear Fruit

Jesus used a metaphor to teach a profound kingdom principle using what was familiar to the people of his day – vines and fruit. He said,

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
²He cuts off every branch *in me* that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:1-2).

In these two verses Jesus set up a test and showed two different outcomes, dependent upon whether you passed the test or not. The branches that bore fruit were pruned so they would be even more fruitful; the branches that did not bear fruit were cut off the vine.

Who are the parties in this parable? Jesus is the true vine; his Father is the gardener; you and I are the branches.

There are two words that are extremely important in verse 2. They are “in me.” In this parable, all the branches – the people – are initially *in Jesus*. But the outcomes for these branches are dependent on whether they bear fruit.

Jesus concluded, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8). There are two reasons for us to bear much fruit. It is to God the Father’s glory and it shows that we are Jesus’ disciples.

Those who produce no fruit are in danger of being cut from the vine. We must bear fruit in order to have salvation and the assurance of salvation.

There's a blessing for those who bear fruit. For example, the person who helps others is himself blessed; the person who bears much fruit is generous toward others. He cares for, comforts and loves others. Isn't that how we want to live and the way the LORD expects us to live as his followers?

We Must Remain In Jesus

Jesus continued:

⁴ "No branch can bear fruit by itself; *it must remain in the vine*. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:4-6).

In verse 4 above, Jesus described the relationship between the branches and the vine, and the necessity of the branch to remain in the vine in order to bear fruit. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain attached to the vine from which it gets its nutrients and life. Jesus said that the same is true of those who follow him – they must remain in him if they would bear fruit for the Kingdom.

Then Jesus explains what happens to those branches (people) that do not remain in the vine (him). *Those branches are cut off, thrown away and wither; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned*. When we read about branches being thrown into the fire and burned, it is a disturbing reminder of those condemned

by God being thrown into the lake of fire at the final judgment.

How do we remain in Jesus? At John 15:10, Jesus said: *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.*"

A requirement for salvation and the assurance of salvation, is remaining in Jesus and obeying his commands.

We Must Be Born Again

It is frightening to think that some mainline denominations don't teach about being born again. They seem to relegate being born again to the Jesus movement of the '60s and '70s. You may share my concern for them after you read what Jesus said about the necessity of being born again.

Jesus made being born again a salvation issue. He told Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, *no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*" Jesus explained further, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:3, 5).

How does a person gain the Holy Spirit and be born again? The answer is found at John 14:15-17, where Jesus explains:

"If you love me, *you will obey what I command.* ¹⁶
And I will ask the Father, and he will give you
another Counselor to be with you forever— ¹⁷ the
Spirit of truth."

Is there corroboration for this? Yes, indeed. At Acts 5:32, Peter defended the disciples before the Sanhedrin. He concluded, "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, *whom God has given to those who obey him.*"

The key to gaining the Holy Spirit and being born again is found in loving Jesus and obeying his commands. If you sincerely commit your love to the LORD and have a heartfelt desire to obey his commands, Jesus will ask the Father who will give you the Holy Spirit.

Receiving of the Holy Spirit and its relationship to obeying the commands of Jesus is shown in additional scriptures. One is at John 14:21 where Jesus said,

“Whoever *has* my commands and *obeys* them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

In this scripture, Jesus mentioned both “having” and “obeying” his commands. It would be very hard to obey if one didn’t know what to obey, wouldn’t it? This raises a question. How are you going to learn what the teachings and commands of Jesus are? Do you know them? If you don’t, what will you do about it? You’ll find the answer to that later in the book.

At John 14:23-24, Jesus said,

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my *teaching*. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”

Jesus said the same here, except he used the word “teaching” instead of “commands.” We are to obey his teachings just as we must obey his commands. Also note that he concluded verse 24 by saying that these words belong to his Father; they are not his own. Again we have corroboration that everything Jesus said and did is the will of God.

My Experience

The following is my personal experience on being born again. As I mentioned earlier, I was a practicing attorney and about 43 years old when I began to seriously study the Scriptures. Finally, as an adult, I came to believe the Bible is true. After that, instead of continuing to study the Scriptures, I just carried my Bible to church. I thought I was a new believer and so did others at church. I traded my Newport Beach party friends and offensive profanity for my new church friends.

Our marriage had been difficult, but now it became worse. I used the scriptures like a whip, telling my wife Dar that she had to submit to me because the scripture said so.

Soon I began to find Christianity boring and asked myself, "Is this all there is?"

Fortunately for me, the LORD drew me back into his Word. It seemed that everything I read contained the words "obey," and "LORD." I had never heard a sermon on the need to obey Jesus, or the need for him to be my LORD. Once again, I began to study diligently.

One day I got before the LORD in prayer and told him, "LORD, you've educated me well. As far as I can tell from your word, you are to be my LORD and I am to obey you. Please be my LORD and I will obey you the best I can the rest of my life."

I don't remember anything special happening at that moment, but in the next day or two I noticed many changes. I seemed to be flooded with a sense of peace in spite of my busy and stressful law practice. I began to experience a joy that I had never known in my life, and I felt a great love for my wife and for others such as I had never experienced.

As a new believer, I didn't know what had happened to me; no one explained to me what happens when a person receives the Holy Spirit. Weeks later, I was reading

Galatians 5:22 where I read, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Aha! I realized then that I now had within me the indwelling Spirit of God – I was experiencing the fruit of the Spirit! But I didn't know how it happened.

Later I read John 14:15-17 and saw that my commitment to obey Jesus as my LORD caused Jesus to ask the Father to give me the Holy Spirit, which he obviously did.

I tell you this because if you have not known the changing power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, it may well be that you have not yet committed yourself to the LORD Jesus, asking him to be your LORD and promising to obey him as best you can for the rest of your life.

I was alone before the LORD when I committed myself to him. You can do the same, too; it is a private transaction between you and the LORD. Ask Jesus to be your LORD and master and to accept you as his bondservant; pledge to give up everything to be his faithful servant, and pledge to obey him in all things.

When you make that commitment to the LORD, he wants you to share what you've done with others. Perhaps they also need to receive Jesus as their LORD, commit to obey him and receive the Holy Spirit. You'll also want to be baptized! See Matthew 28:18-20.

A. W. Tozer tests the commitment of those wanting to be filled with the Holy Spirit by asking some important questions:

"Are you sure that you want to be possessed by a spirit other than your own? Even though that spirit be the pure Spirit of God? Even though He be the very gentle essence of the gentle Jesus? Even though He be sane and pure and free? Even though He be wisdom personified, wisdom Himself, even though He have a healing, precious ointment to

distill? Even though He be loving as the heart of God? That Spirit, if He ever possesses you, will be the LORD of your life!" From Tozer's *How to Be Filled With the Spirit*, pages 42-43.

Tozer's questions remind us again that we must make a single-minded commitment to receive Jesus as our LORD and to offer ourselves to him as his bondservants. For those ambivalent about giving up the world and its allures, this will never work. James speaks about such a person: That man should not think he will receive anything from the LORD; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does (James 1:7).

After you receive the Holy Spirit, you have been born again and have become a child of God. Your relationship with God has changed. He wants you to call him "Father." Jesus taught that God is jealous of his relationship with you as your Father:

"Do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9).

Now you can understand John's statement at John 1:12-13:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, *he gave the right to become children of God*— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but *born of God*.

When we are born again we are born of God – children of God. Imagine that incredible privilege! That is truly the grace of God. I remember standing on the balcony of our home in Christchurch, New Zealand, looking out over the city at the Southern Alps in awe that the loving creator of the universe wants me to call him "Father."

Sadly, many do not realize that Jesus said a person must be born again or they will never see the kingdom of heaven. It is a salvation issue. Those who are not born

again have no assurance of salvation and, according to Jesus, no salvation.

The next section is about those who are or were servants of the LORD, but who do not remain faithful and are condemned by God.

We Must Remain Faithful

Jesus told parables that have important information for us to understand. We will now examine parables that involve servants. All the parties in the parables (except for the Master or King) are servants of the Master or King. This is extremely important to understand, as we will see that some servants of the King are condemned to hell for being unfaithful.

In the section regarding unforgiveness, we saw a servant who was deeply indebted to the King, but was shown mercy; the King canceled his entire debt. He must have been a servant with great responsibilities in order to amass such a large debt. Yet, when he proved to be merciless with a fellow servant who owed him a small sum, the King reinstated the entire debt and turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed – an impossible task. The story ends with a warning by Jesus, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:35).

There are two major lessons here. The first is that if we are disobedient to the teachings and commands of Jesus, we may be thrown into hell. The second is that even if we once were responsible servants of the LORD Jesus, subsequent acts of disobedience may be punishable by eternal damnation.

The Story of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants

Jesus told another frightening story of two servants who were in charge of other servants in the master's household:

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸ But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' ⁴⁹ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:45-51).

This story has many lessons. The first is that the faithful and wise servant pleased his master by doing what he was supposed to do by caring for the servants in his charge. Jesus said it will be good for that servant when his master returns.

The second shows a different scenario. The servant in charge is described as wicked! His punishment was more severe than in any other parable. It says "He (the Master) will *cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites*, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This shows us that even in the church, among those who are apparently Christians with responsible positions, are those who are wicked. This wicked servant was found out by his Master. This sounds like extreme punishment, apparently reserved for wicked servants and hypocrites.

Do we know such people in the church today? Of course! Far too frequently we hear about pastors who have

engaged in sexual sins. We don't often hear about those who are consumed with pride or who distort the gospel for their own purposes, perhaps believing they can build a bigger church with more people if the true gospel is watered down. They seem to have no concern that their watered down gospel will not save. No wonder God heaps extreme punishment upon them.

But let's not assume this applies only to pastors. All of us who are followers of the LORD Jesus are his servants. We all have responsibilities in the kingdom, some more than others. If we are unfaithful in fulfilling our duties as servants of our King, we may expect the same treatment.

The Parable of the Talents

Jesus taught, "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²²"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²⁴ "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

²⁸ "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰ And *throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matthew 25:14-30).

This parable teaches the same lessons as the parable about the faithful and unfaithful servants, but with a slight variation.

These three men have one thing in common: they are servants of the master. It isn't a story of two servants and one outsider; they were all the master's servants.

An important lesson here is that if you're not a faithful servant, you may be characterized by the LORD as a worthless servant and be cast out into the darkness – into hell – even though you once followed the LORD Jesus.

The second observation is that this paragraph deals with acting appropriately and responsibly with the tasks we've

been given. This parable specifically deals with men given sums of money, but the general principle is that we are each given responsibilities according to our abilities. Ephesians 2:10 says, "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

God prepared our tasks in advance and he takes these assignments very seriously. If we're lazy, inept or unwilling, he will consider us a worthless servant.

The Parable of the Seed

Jesus told this parable:

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶ Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown" (Luke 8:5-8).

We are specially blessed with this important parable because Jesus explained it:

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² 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. ¹³ Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴ The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. ¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the

word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (Luke 8:11-15).

The seed was scattered along the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on fertile soil. Three of the four soils failed to produce a crop. Of the seed that fell on fertile soil, Jesus said, “The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

Only those on the path were not initially saved. Those on rocky soil soon fell away because they had no root. Those on the soil with thorns had their faith “choked out by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.” Those without root and those whom the thorns choked out, followed Jesus, but did not “stand firm to the end.” Again, salvation was denied those who had no root and those whose faith was choked out by life’s worries and pleasures. Only those who produced a crop for the kingdom were saved. They were faithful!

The assurance of salvation is only possible for the faithful – those who do what the LORD asks them to do, those who produce a crop for the kingdom, who use their talents to produce more and who remain faithful to the end.

We Must Love Our Brothers

Jesus said: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

God knows that our actions are the evidence of what we believe. Our love for other believers shows that we are Jesus’ disciples. It is said that in the time of the early church, the love shown by Christians for one another caused non-believers to want to become Christians, even though being a Christian might invite persecution and even death.

Jesus gave us examples of how we should show our love for one another in his description of the judgment:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘LORD, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘LORD, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-46).

Those who loved their brethren fed the hungry, gave drink to those who were thirsty, invited in the stranger, gave clothes to those needing them, and visited the sick and those in prison. Their actions proved their love for their brothers. They were called righteous; their reward is eternal life!

The others who did none of these things, also proved by their actions that they did not love their brothers. What was their fate? Jesus said they will go away to eternal punishment.

We’ve already seen that some claim salvation is all (or only) about faith, not works or all (or only) about grace. This parable never mentions faith or grace, neither does Revelation 20:11-15, where the White Throne judgment is described, and where it states: “The dead were judged *according to what they had done* as recorded in the books” and “each person was judged *according to what he had done*” (Rev. 20:12, 13). This is exactly what Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats teaches. Both the sheep and the goats were judged *according to what they had done*.

Does this mean grace and faith are not important to salvation? No, of course not. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:9). But we are judged according to what we have done because our actions are the evidence of our faith – they are the proof of what we really believe.

Those engaged in showing their love for their brethren are likely confident about their salvation and experience the assurance of salvation.

We Must Obey the LORD Jesus

We are often told of the need for faith, but seldom about the need to obey; if we are not obedient to the teachings and commands of the LORD Jesus we have no salvation. Let's look again at Matthew 7:21 where Jesus sets forth a salvation principle:

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'LORD, LORD,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**"*

Jesus expressly states that **only** those who **do** the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven. The beginning of that verse refers to people who "talk the walk," rather than "walk the talk." They say they are Christians, they even call Jesus "LORD," but they don't do what he says. Many times we've reviewed the scriptures that show that everything Jesus said and did was what God the Father told him to do and say, thus making everything Jesus said and did the will of God.

Let's look again at Jesus' condemnation of those who refuse to obey in one of the most frightening of all the statements of Jesus:

"Many will say to me on that day, 'LORD, LORD, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

The horrifying thing about this scripture is that the people described here prophesied in Jesus' name, in his name they drove out demons and performed many miracles. You and I would likely think of them as super-Christians. Not God, though, he looks at the heart and sees that these people refused to obey; they were lawless. Jesus even said he *never* knew them. Apparently, these people had never committed to obey Jesus and to do the will of the Father.

What about those who do obey Jesus' teachings and commands and who do the will of the Father? They will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21).

Matthew continued with yet another scripture where Jesus emphasized obedience to *his* words:

"Therefore everyone who hears *these words of mine* and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears *these words of mine* and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7:24-27).

Jesus emphasized again that those who hear "*these words of mine*" and puts them into practice are the wise ones whose house will not fall. But those who hear "*these words of mine*" and do not put them into practice are foolish and have built a house on sand that will fall with a great crash.

Consider some of the many verses that emphasize Jesus' words: *obey **me***" (John 14:15), ***my** commands* (John 14:21), ***my** teaching*" (John 14:23), *obey everything **I** have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:19-20), *for all who obey **him*** (Hebrews 5:9), *gospel of our **LORD Jesus***" (2 Thessalonians 1:8), *all that **I** have commanded you* (Matthew 28:19-20), *obey **my** commands* (John 15: 10), *do what **I** command*" (John 15:14), *to those who obey **him*** (John 14:15-16), *those who obey **him***" (Acts 5:32), ***my** commands and obeys them* (John 14:21), *obey **my** teaching* (John 14:23), ***my** teaching* (John 14:24), ***my** teaching* (John 8:31-32), *these words of **mine*** (Matthew 7:24), and *keeps **my** word* (John 8:51).

The emphasized words above are very significant. We've learned that everything Jesus said is what his Father told

him to say. It should be no surprise then that those words have supernatural power. Scripture emphasizes the importance of Jesus' words – that they are spirit and they are life (John 6:63), that they are the words of eternal life (John 6:68) and that his words will never pass away (Matthew 24:35).

Hopefully you understand that obedience to the teachings and commands of Jesus is not an option! There is no salvation for the disobedient and certainly no valid assurance of salvation.

On the other hand, those who obey our LORD Jesus, thus doing the will of God, have confidence before God (1 John 3:21) – the very assurance of salvation we seek! John assures us that those who obey his commands live in him [Jesus], and he in them (1 John 3:24; see also John 14:24).

John assures us that this is how we know we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. That surely sounds like the assurance of salvation, doesn't it?

Love the LORD Your God With Your All

What does God require of us? Jesus directly answered that question: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matthew 22:37).

What does that commandment mean to us? It means no reservations or compromises – a single-minded devotion to him! A good illustration might be the poker expression "All in," which has become part of the American vocabulary. It refers to the player who pushes all his chips into the center of the table – he bets everything he has.

Jesus told us to count the cost of following him, that is, to make an informed decision about whether to become his

disciples and follow him. We're to tell seekers in advance, *before they commit to follow Jesus*, what the costs of following him will be – something rarely done today. Jesus explains this hypothetically:

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’”

Those people who are not told about the costs of following Jesus or do not seriously consider those costs before deciding to follow Jesus, often fall away from the faith when they encounter hardship and persecution.

Remember Ray Comfort's examples of the tens of thousands of people who purportedly made a commitment to follow Jesus – likely in response to the exhortation to “accept Jesus as your personal Savior.” One year later they were nowhere to be found. They were not attending church, and had no evidence of a saving faith. This happens over and over again. When adversity strikes, and it most likely will because the evil one does not want to lose one of his followers, the person gives up and goes back into the world. These people did not consider the cost before being cajoled into “accepting Jesus as their personal Savior.”

Jesus predicted this in his parable of the sower and the seed: “The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short while. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away” (Matthew 13:20-21).

Does Jesus require that we be single-minded in our devotion to him? Absolutely! He used an example that is a little hard for the western mind to understand:

“Suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?
³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace” (Luke 14:31-32).

Why is this example significant? Because Jesus said the king with the lesser force would send a delegation and ask for terms of peace. In Old Testament times, a king with a superior force might kill the entire opposing army, then take the country or city as spoils, including all the women and children. Thus, the delegation might go to the king who has the superior army and offer themselves to him as his slaves, including their possessions, if he would only spare their lives.

You can now better understand what Jesus said, “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Having no reservations when committing to Jesus means not having **any** area of your life that delights in the things of the world. Instead, you are to receive the LORD Jesus Christ as LORD and Master and offer yourself to him as his bond-slave, and commit to do whatever he wants you to do.

After receiving Jesus as LORD and Master, God gives you the Holy Spirit and he becomes your Father. You are then born again and will begin to experience the fruit of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). You will then have the evidence and assurance of salvation.

Become As a Little Child

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as

these. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, *anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*" (Mark 10:14-15).

What does Jesus mean when he says, "... anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child"? How would a little child receive the kingdom of God?

Consider some of the characteristics of a little child – trusting, honest, humble, teachable and open.

What characteristic would a little child not have? Pride! God hates pride!

Jesus told a story that illustrates this:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14).

Do you suppose that humility is one of the characteristics we must have in order to enter the kingdom of God? It seems so, doesn't it? At Matthew 18:3-4, Jesus said:

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, *whoever humbles himself like this child* is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Those who humble themselves before God show that they know God. Those who are puffed up with pride show that they do not know God, or seem unaware that they are nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of God.

Humility is a salvation test. We must have the humility of a little child if we would enter the kingdom of heaven.

We Must Not Swear

The heading above might cause you to think it means not using profanity, but that is not the issue. It speaks of not swearing to tell the truth. Jesus explained it this way:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the LORD.’³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.³⁷ Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:33-37).

Jesus made this a command by saying that if we go beyond a simple “Yes” or “No” it comes from the evil one. Isn’t that amazing? In the western world, we are asked to swear to tell the truth in a courtroom when being sworn in as a witness. The clerk usually says, “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” it is interesting that God is invoked in that oath – the total opposite of what we are commanded not to do.

James made swearing a very serious matter, saying:

Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your

"Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or *you will be condemned* (James 5:12).

Yes, we can be condemned for swearing to tell the truth. Think of the person who is trying to convince another that what he is saying is true, "I swear to you this is so!" And what if it is *not* so?

Consider experiments where people are shown an identical image of an accident or other violent scene. Although they witness the same event, they will not remember it in the same way. There are usually significant differences in their testimony. Each, though, believes that what he is relating is the truth. Obviously, some are wrong.

Perhaps because of James' firm prohibition against swearing, early believers refused to take the usual oath in the courts that required them to swear in God's name. The courts devised an alternative that might resemble the following:

Do you declare (or affirm) that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, knowing full well the penalty for perjury thereof?

This alternative oath might not help a person tell the truth, but will prevent him from inadvertently telling an untruth in God's name. Our memories can be fallible, particularly as we get older; thus swearing to an untruth is certainly a possibility. Avoid the condemnation James promises and do not swear.

When I have had to testify, I simply ask the court clerk to give me the alternative oath. They've always complied.

You Must Be Known By Jesus

Below is one of the most frightening teachings of Jesus:

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages,

teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.²³ Someone asked him, "LORD, are only a few people going to be saved?"

He said to them,²⁴ "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

²⁶"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

²⁷"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'" (Luke 13:22-27).

We are sometimes told that we must know Jesus. That is true, of course, but perhaps more important is that Jesus must know us! Suppose you went through your life believing you were a Christian. You regularly went to church, you prayed, tithed, participated in church activities and even did work around the church when needed. You thought you were a good Christian and everyone assured you that you were as well. The time of the judgment comes. Instead of being in heaven, as you expected, you are facing the White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). Instead of hearing Jesus say, "Welcome, good and faithful servant," you hear him say, "I don't know you or where you come from." Could there be anything more terrifying? If Jesus doesn't know you, your name is surely not in the Lamb's Book of Life; if it is not there, you will be condemned to hell.

This teaching is horrifying because the person condemned was intimately familiar with Jesus, saying, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." Likewise, those of us who have attended church for some time can be intimately familiar with Jesus. We have the full Scripture to inform us of his ministry, his miracles, his death and resurrection, and his return to heaven. We've taken communion, been baptized and pray in his name.

According to this parable, there will be throngs of people trying to enter heaven, but will not be allowed in. Why not? Although the parable does not explicitly say why, the answer is there. Jesus calls these people "evildoers." Yes, they are wicked, even though they thought of themselves as good Christians, and Jesus as a familiar buddy. These people could have been deceived by seeker-friendly messages in their church that took pains to make sure they didn't feel guilty. Because of their disobedience to Jesus and his teachings and commands, these people did not do what was right (were not righteous) and did not do the will of God (Matthew 7:21).

A similar incident is recorded at Matthew 7:22-23, where the judgment was taking place and people were arguing with Jesus about why they should gain entry into heaven:

"Many will say to me on that day, 'LORD, LORD, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

How dreadfully familiar is Jesus' response! This time he says, "I never knew you!" Again he concludes, "Away from me, you evildoers!"

As we saw earlier, this teaching is especially chilling because the people had prophesied in Jesus' name, they had driven out demons in his name, and performed many miracles. What more could they do? Surely they would be entitled to heaven!

No, they are not entitled because Jesus regarded them as evildoers.

It hardly matters what you think of yourself as a Christian because you can rationalize and deceive yourself. What matters is what God thinks of you. He will judge you according to his revealed word – the teachings and commands of Jesus. If you are disobedient to those

teachings and commands, you are not doing the will of God and will not be permitted in heaven.

Jesus taught the same:

“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. ⁴⁸ There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; *that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.* ⁴⁹ For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (John 12:47-50).

Did you notice the italicized portion of these scriptures – “That very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.” What is that “very word”? It is the teachings and commands of Jesus.

If you are disobedient to his teachings and commands, Jesus will say, “I don’t know you!” There is obviously no salvation or assurance of salvation for such people.

We Must Never Disown Jesus

Jesus warned, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

A story has been handed down through the centuries regarding an incident that occurred in the early church that illustrates what first century believers understood about the necessity of never disowning Jesus before men:

In the days of the early church, Caesar decreed that everyone in the Roman empire would greet each other with the salutation, "Caesar is Lord."

Some Roman soldiers met a Christian father and demanded he greet them with, "Caesar is Lord."

He refused, saying, "Jesus is LORD."

When the father continued to refuse, he and his family were taken to the lions' arena in Rome and told that unless he proclaimed, "Caesar is Lord," one by one his family would be thrown to the lions.

He was horrified, but shook his head and repeated softly, "Jesus is LORD."

The officials angrily ordered his youngest child, a son, to be thrown to the lions. As the family watched, the boy was torn apart by the lions. Again the father was commanded to proclaim that Caesar is Lord.

Choking back tears, he responded as before, "Jesus is LORD."

Another child and still another were thrown to the lions.

The officials themselves were appalled. They had expected the father to compromise his beliefs and say that Caesar was Lord. They sympathetically told the father that the words weren't important, that even though he didn't believe them, all he had to do was say them and he and the rest of his family would be saved.

With pain and anguish on his face, the man repeated, "I cannot. Jesus is LORD."

The entire family perished that day.

Their death underscores who they knew to be "LORD," namely the *LORD* Jesus Christ. They understood that *LORD* was not an honorary title. To the early church, the fact that *Jesus is LORD* was worth dying for. Surely they knew that Jesus said he would acknowledge before the angels of God those who acknowledge him, but he would disown before the angels of God those who disown him before men (Luke 12:8-9).

The first-century church was taught by Peter, Paul, and the other apostles. The father who refused to call Caesar "Lord" may have heard Paul teach, "*There is but one LORD, Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

There are many subtle ways in which we can disown the LORD. For example, when others are mocking him and using his name profanely, but we say nothing, aren't we disowning him for our own comfort? Our silence is a sign of approval.

When we're in the presence of those who profanely use Jesus' name when they say, "Jesus Christ!" as an expletive, we have a choice. Some may laugh or chuckle with approval. I usually say, "You're talking about my boss!" or "You know my boss?" It is surprising how my response often changes the content of their speech. By responding as such, we are not disowning Jesus, but rather owning him – declaring to the world that we are his followers.

We won't be saved if we disown our LORD.

The Cost of Salvation

A favorite expression of many preachers is, "Salvation is FREE!" This statement is derived from the biblical truth that salvation is a gift. Apparently, those preachers think that all gifts must be free.

Gifts are often given with strings attached. For example, suppose you purchased a car from a dealer. Later, another

dealer offered the free gift of an oil change for anyone who owned the exact model car that you bought, but restricted the gift to those who bought the car at his dealership. If you went there to get your “free” oil change, you’d be turned away because you didn’t purchase your car from that dealer. So it is with the gift of salvation. It is a gift! It cannot be earned or bought. But neither can it be had unless the conditions of the gift are met.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says,

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Some erroneously say that the “gift of God” is our faith. No, the gift is salvation as is proved by Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our LORD.”

These verses say salvation is the gift of God! They also say we have been saved *through faith*! Whose faith? Our faith. Yes, the first criteria is that we must have faith. Faith in what? As we saw in John’s Test One, it is faith in our LORD Jesus. (See Acts 20:20.) Faith in Jesus includes believing in all he is and all he said – his teachings and commands. If we do not obey his teachings and commands, do we have faith in him? No! Paul said his calling was to call people to the obedience that comes from faith (Romans 1:5).

There are some hard requirements among Jesus’ teachings and commands for those who want to follow Jesus and be saved:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:25-27).

What? Is Jesus calling us to hate those we would naturally love the most? No, of course not! But he is setting up a precedent of how much we are to love him in relation to how much we love those closest to us – even ourselves. We are to love him so much that, by comparison, our love for those closest to us is hate.

This truth is corroborated at Matthew 10:37-38:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;³⁸ and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Here we find the interpretation of Luke 14:25-27 above – we are not to love anyone more than our LORD Jesus.

Dar and I encountered a real application of those scriptures when we felt the LORD calling us to go to New Zealand. One of our daughters said, “You’re deserting your grandchildren!” Instantly, these verses came to mind, reminding me that I must love the LORD Jesus more than anyone. My mother said, “You won’t be here to bury us!” Again, the scripture reminded me of loving Jesus more.

Jesus added two additional requirements at Luke 14:25-27. Unless we (1) carry our cross and (2) follow him, we cannot be his disciples.

Jesus was going to carry his cross and die on it. Why must we carry our cross, and what else would we do with it? Paul told us at Romans 6:6: “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

We are to carry our cross to crucify our old self so that we will no longer be slaves to sin. Paul taught, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).

I often had what I first thought was a strange experience concerning these scriptures. I would often pray that I would die to self and to slavery to sin. I envisioned being crucified. I would lay down on the cross, but realized that I could not crucify myself. Even if I were capable of driving a spike through one wrist, the other would be free. I had to ask the LORD to have an angel drive the spike through both my wrists. The angel would do as instructed, but I don't remember feeling any pain. The LORD stood there watching this. After my body had been "crucified," I would rise out of my body to join the LORD, and we'd walk away together. My physical body, still on the cross, would be screaming "You can't do this to me!" I noticed that when I continued to do this crucifixion exercise, day after day, the screams from the body on the cross became less and less until they finally seemed to stop. Soon after, I stopped with this exercise because it didn't seem necessary any more.

Jesus also commanded we must *follow* him. A disciple is a *follower* of a mentor, teacher, or other wise figure. Jesus commanded his followers – his disciples – to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:29). Followers of Jesus are also disciples of Jesus.

Jesus commanded his disciples to teach new disciples to obey everything he had commanded them.

Can we be a follower or disciple of Jesus if we do not obey him? Can we have a saving faith in the LORD Jesus if we do not obey him? If we disregard what Jesus taught and commanded us to do, can we truthfully claim we believe in him? Scripture says the answer to those questions is a resounding NO.

The follower of the LORD Jesus who loves him and obeys him has both salvation and the assurance of salvation.

Our Words Can Condemn Us

Jesus warned,

“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶ But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:35-37).

When Jesus begins a sentence with, “But I tell you ...” you know that you will be hearing something different – a kingdom principle from Jesus that we should pay particular attention to. In this case, he tells us what only he could know, “... men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.” It becomes a salvation issue when Jesus concludes that we will be acquitted or condemned by our words.

Do we speak carelessly? Some of the worst sins may be slander and gossip throughout Scripture. Why would that be so awful in God’s eyes? When you say something about another person that you do not know for certain is true – which, in fact, is false – the hearer can spread this false information to others, further perpetrating an untruth. In some small communities gossip spreads like wildfire and with similar damage. Suppose you later find out that what you said was false. Can you repair the damage? You may be able to find the person you talked to and say, “I was wrong. That was not true.” But will all the others who heard the gossip learn it was false? Almost certainly not.

Reputations can be ruined by gossip and slander. When a newspaper writes a front-page story that slanders a person and later finds the allegations are false, where is the retraction printed? Is it a front-page story? Oh, no! It is very often found in small print towards the end of the newspaper. How about those people who only read the front-page story, unaware there was a retraction?

Depending on the allegations, the person's reputation could be seriously compromised in the minds of many. In their eyes, the person is damaged by the story. These false allegations could affect his livelihood, and even his friendships because some might not want to associate with him.

James also found the tongue to be dangerous: "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:6).

The LORD Jesus told John to write this down: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and *all liars*—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Rev. 21:8).

"All liars" are included in the list of those who will be condemned. Slander is always false – a lie; gossip often is. What happens to liars? Their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur.

Likewise, notice Paul's warning:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards *nor slanderers* nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

If you are a gossip, a slanderer or a liar, you have no place in the kingdom of God – you are without salvation or the assurance of salvation and are destined for the fiery lake of burning sulphur. Obviously, if you engage in any of these things it is time to repent and change! NOW!

The old adage holds true: If you can't say anything good about another person, don't say anything at all.

Teachings and Commands of Jesus Bible Study

Earlier in this book, I promised to show you about a way to learn the teachings and commands of Jesus.

First of all, if you have a reliable Bible translation, you already have the essentials to learn and obey the teachings and commands of Jesus.

I sometimes tend to gloss over familiar passages. You might do the same as well. This can be particularly true with the teachings and commands of Jesus. If so, we may fail to see what the LORD wants to teach us.

I recommend the Bible study I wrote titled *The Teachings and Commands of Jesus*, which is part of my obedience to Jesus' command to "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you."

The study is FREE and is available to anyone with Internet access at www.bereanpublishers.com and Adobe Acrobat Reader. Simply click on the third link – "Bible Study" – in the left column. There you will find Unit #1, Unit #2 and Unit #3. If you do not have Adobe Acrobat Reader, a free download is available at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>. Depending on the speed of your Internet connection, it might take a few minutes to download.

The study is segmented into daily studies, five per week. There are a total of 40 weeks in all. In about 10 months you can study all the teachings and commands of Jesus at least once. I integrated related writings from other New Testament authors to give a more complete understanding of the teachings and commands of Jesus.

To achieve a deeper understanding of the material, I recommend that you take one lesson per day. Before you begin, ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind to what you will learn that day, and to show you how to apply the lesson in your daily life.

Remember, this is not a rote exercise in which you are simply completing an assignment. Instead, it is God's way of having you come to know him and the LORD Jesus through the teachings and commands of the LORD Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit's way of showing you how to live in a way that brings glory and honor to God, and how to extend his kingdom here on earth as faithful servants of our LORD Jesus.

In this chapter, we examined several of the teachings and commands of Jesus, but there are many more. The Bible study contains 382 separate headings that include at least one teaching or command.

The wonderful thing about those commands is that they reveal the nature and character of God – his righteousness, purity, holiness and his love, so that we can come to know and love him.

Jesus' teachings and commands show us how God wants us to live so we also may be righteous, pure, holy and loving.

The Bible study can be done individually or as a group study.

Email me at editors@bereanpublishers.com if you have questions while doing the study. I'll do the best I can to answer your questions.

It is worth noting, that Pastor Trent Renner, the founding pastor of Parkway Christian Church in Arizona, decided to preach through the teachings and commands of Jesus. Although many discouraged him by claiming a sermon series should not exceed eight weeks, Trent continued for three years, during which time his church continued to grow. Trent sent me an email he received from a pastor he sent the study to: "Thanks again for forwarding Bernie's material last year. I started the series in December and it is going incredibly well. I really think that this series will have a lasting impact."

I recently exchanged emails with Trent. He made some observations regarding the study of the "Teachings and Commands of Jesus" that he directed to you, the reader:

"The Teaching and Commands of Jesus are most effective when I use them as Christ intended them to be used – amongst ONE ANOTHER. If you want the Teachings and Commands to change your life then COMMIT to STUDY and OBEY every Teaching and Command of Jesus with another important person in your life.

"The Teachings and Commands of Jesus applied amongst a group of "ONE-ANOTHERS" will alter your life for eternity. The greatest gift you can give to yourself, and the people you care about, is a commitment to apply these teachings and commands to ONE-ANOTHER's lives. Invite others to join you and begin the adventure of pursuing the King of King's Teachings and Commands for our lives. You and the others who make this commitment will never be the same."

I highly recommend that you do the Bible study alone or in a group before teaching it to others. By teaching this study, you, too, will be obeying Jesus' command to "teach them to obey all that I have commanded you."

Even though they would have been willing to do the will of God, many will not because they won't know his will and thus not be able to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 7:21). Learning and obeying the teachings and commands of Jesus – the will of God – is a salvation issue.

Chapter 4

More Tests

Test: Do You Continue in Sin?

Paul was an evangelist to the Gentiles. These people were living in sinful, idol-worshipping, hedonistic cultures. When Paul led them to faith in the LORD Jesus, it is not surprising that he taught and commanded them to stop sinning and warned them of the dangers of continuing in sin. As we might expect, Paul wrote to the Galatians:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that *those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God* (Galatians 5:19-21).

Note the warning: *Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God*. Even though they had accepted Paul's message, he warned that they must not continue in sin – live like this – or they would not be saved. John said much the same: "No one who continues in sin has either seen him or known him" (1 John 3:6).

Paul raised the ante with the Ephesians, saying there must not even be the appearance of evil:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with

empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient (Ephesians 5:3-6).

Paul did not mince words. He made his warning clear: "*Of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*" He further warned that some may try to deceive them with empty words, and that *God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

Paul warned the Colossians of the coming wrath of God: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming" (Colossians 3:5-6).

Similarly, he warned the Corinthians:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Paul's warnings permeate his letters. He warned of the wrath of God against those who continue in sin, and that *the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

To the Thessalonians, however, he wrote about the will of God. The words "will of God" should cause us to remember Matthew 7:21, where Jesus said that *only those who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven.* Consider the following:

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶ and that

in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The LORD will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6).

In these prior scriptures, Paul has given us two warnings from God and then told us the will of God regarding our behavior. The first warning is that continuing in sin results in God's wrath; the second warning is that there will be no inheritance in heaven for those who continue in sin. The will of God is the opposite – true believers will be sanctified, they'll avoid sexual immorality and control their bodies in a way that is holy and honorable; they won't intentionally wrong their brother or take advantage of him.

There is no assurance of salvation for those who continue in sin! But those who seek to know and do the will of God have both salvation and the joyful assurance of salvation.

Test: You Must Be Holy

What does "holy" mean? What is holiness? We must make every effort to learn what these words mean. The author of Hebrews wrote:

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; *without holiness no one will see the LORD* (Hebrews 12:14).

The Greek word *Hagiasmos* is translated "holiness" in most translations and "sanctification" in the New American Standard translation. It means (a) separation to God, and (b) conduct befitting those separated to God. As we see from the above scripture, sanctification (holiness) is the state *predetermined by God* for believers. We see from Hebrews 12:14 there is no salvation for those who are not holy.

The word "saints" is derived from the root word for "sanctification." Saints are sanctified – set apart to God and conduct themselves befitting to God.

Paul reminded the Ephesians, "You were taught ... to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and *holiness*" (Ephesians 4:22-24). Yes, you obtained the new self when you became a child of God, when you were born again. That new self – created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness – was doubtless created to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus that he might be the first of many brothers – a condition also predestined by God for those who will be saved (Romans 8:29).

God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in his *holiness* (Hebrews 12:10). We should pray for those in authority over us so, "that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and *holiness*" (1 Timothy 2:2). Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting *holiness* out of reverence for God (2 Cor. 7:1).

Did you notice how many times Paul warned against being deceived? Think of the ways we can be deceived today. The world bombards us with sin, making it seem attractive and mainstream, and having us believe that everyone is doing it. Sadly, many of our churches have stopped preaching against unrighteousness and wickedness – sins that prevent those who practice such things from inheriting the kingdom of heaven.

Holiness is certainly an indication of salvation and a reason for the assurance of salvation.

Test: Deliberate Sin?

At Hebrews 10:26-27 we find a frightening warning:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for

sins is left,²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

In that frightening scripture, there are three elements we must consider carefully. The first is the word "deliberate." Some sins are almost always deliberate. Sexual sin is deliberate. The physical act of adultery, fornication, choosing to view pornographic websites, among other sexual sins, are deliberate acts. If we choose to lie, slander and/or cheat, we are also engaging in deliberate sin.

The second element is the phrase "keep on sinning." John warned, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him" (1 John 3:6). At 1 John 5:18, John said, "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin." This means that anyone who would deliberately keep on sinning is not born of God, does not live in God, and has neither seen him nor known.

The third important phrase is "after we have received the knowledge of the truth." This refers to the person who has been informed about God's requirements to refrain from sin and to be holy and righteous. Peter corroborated, "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning" (2 Peter 2:20).

We are not perfect. Only Jesus walked this earth without sin. Each of us can sin by losing our temper, speaking carelessly, or otherwise unintentionally breaking the laws of Christ – his teachings and commands. Likely, we don't intentionally engage in these types of sin. This might be why Paul tells us at 2 Corinthians 13:5 that we must examine ourselves. As soon as we become aware of these sins, we must quickly repent and confess our sin.

There is a big difference when we sin deliberately, as opposed to inadvertently (Hebrews 10:26-27).

When people deliberately choose to continue in sin, they are actively rebelling against God. They are choosing evil desires over obedience, the corruption of the world over the ways of the Kingdom of our LORD. (See 2 Peter 1:3-4.) Is it any wonder why God would be angry with them?

There is only one remedy for deliberate sin – repentance. Repentance after deliberate sin must be heartfelt and sincere. Some may choose to deliberately sin with the idea that they can always confess that sin and regain good standing with the LORD; they are being presumptuous of God’s grace and forgiveness. They forget that God knows their hearts and the very thoughts in which they planned to sin and later seek forgiveness.

There is neither salvation nor assurance of salvation for those who deliberately continue in sin, but “only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:27).

Chapter 5

Popular Anti-Righteousness Expressions

Introduction

By now, you've observed in John's "tests" and in the teachings and commands of the LORD Jesus, the remarkable emphasis on righteousness and holiness. The emphasis on the warnings against sin is equally as strong.

In Chapter 2, we learned that false doctrines tend to minimize the requirements for righteousness in our lives and diminish our awareness of the awfulness of sin in God's eyes.

In this chapter, we'll examine some catchy phrases and arguments often used by those who believe in false doctrines, or who may simply be parroting what they've heard from others. Whatever the reason, these expressions are rooted in false beliefs and create a false understanding of biblical Christianity.

We're Not Under Law ...

Because the call to be righteous is so pervasive in Christ's teachings, many attempts to nullify Jesus' commands are made by purveyors of false doctrines. They frequently quote Paul's teaching: "We're not under law, we're under grace!" (Romans 6:14-15). The law Paul was referring to was Old Testament law – the law the Jews were given by Moses. We know it was Old Testament law because of the confrontations that arose in Galatia where the Judaizers tried to force the Galatian Christians to observe Old Testament rules and regulations, e.g., circumcision (see Galatians 2:4-5). Paul confronted Peter saying, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is

it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" (Galatians 2:14).

Paul said that he was under law: "I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law" (1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2). By equating God's law with Christ's law, Paul recognized that the teachings and commands of Jesus – Christ's law – came from God. Paul taught that believers must obey the gospel of the LORD Jesus:

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our LORD Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the LORD and from the majesty of his power ... (2 Thessalonians 1:8-10).

We know this scripture refers to the teachings and commands of Jesus because it promises to punish those who do not obey the gospel of our LORD Jesus. This scripture gives further urgency to "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

Yes, we are under law Christ's Law – the teachings and commands of our LORD Jesus.

Imputed Righteousness

Another attempt to subvert the teachings and commands of Jesus is to claim that the only righteousness believers need is the *imputed*, perfect righteousness of Jesus. They say that if they believe rightly, God will see in them the perfect righteousness of Jesus, notwithstanding their conduct that may be wicked. They rely on scriptures such as, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28). Again, they rely on a statement that refers to the Old Testament Law, not Christ's law, which is composed of his teachings and commands. They claim that God only looks at the righteousness of Jesus and imputes his perfect righteousness to those who believe in him.

Although Paul stated that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law, it was Paul who told us his mission statement at Romans 1:5: "Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the *obedience* that comes *from* faith." According to Paul, his primary mission was not to teach people what to believe, but to call people to the *obedience* that comes from faith.

Obedience to whom? To the LORD Jesus. What are we to obey? Everything the LORD Jesus said in his teachings and commands. Isn't it amazing that the antinomians dare to claim that what Paul declared as his life's work, for which he received grace and apostleship, does not apply to them?

We have seen throughout this book numerous commands concerning conduct. Almost all of the teachings and commands of Jesus are about our conduct, yet our conduct would be irrelevant if God required nothing more than Christ's perfect righteousness imputed to us.

John defined righteousness: "He who *does* what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who *does* what is sinful is of the devil" (1 John 3:7). John brought us back to conduct, not an imputed righteousness. He also said, "We know we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him, but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). What does John say about the claims of the antinomians and other purveyors of the false gospel that conduct doesn't count? John says they are of the devil, that they are liars and that the truth is not in them. (See 1 John 2:4 and 3:10.)

Unconditional Love of God

Another phrase that has become very popular is "the unconditional love of God." That is an integral part of the teachings and doctrines that claim that one's salvation is

also unconditional. The “once saved, always saved” false teaching is defined by Charles Stanley’s claim that if one ever had a moment of faith, then one is unconditionally saved. The supporting statement for that false claim is another false claim – God’s unconditional love.

God’s love is not unconditional. The teachings of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, reveal God’s *conditional* love. Read Deuteronomy 28 in the Old Testament. The entire chapter contrasts God’s blessings and God’s curses of Israel based on its obedience to God’s commands. The first 14 verses recite God’s promised blessings; verses 15 through 68 prophesy God’s curses on the people if they disobey him. The people of Israel did disobey and were cursed – just as God had warned.

We find at John 14:21 and 23-24 In the New Testament examples of God’s conditional love:

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. *He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him*” (John 14:21).

Jesus replied, “*If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me*” (John 14:23-24).

In verse 21 (above), Jesus first defined the person who loved him as the one who has his commands and obeys them. Then he states that both he and his father will love *those who love him* – that is the condition.

In verse 23, Jesus states that his Father will love the person who loves him (the person who obeys his teaching). The condition for God’s love is that the person loves Jesus and shows it by obeying his teaching.

In verse 24, Jesus declares that those who do not love him will not obey his teaching. Then he assures us that those words are not his own, but belong to the Father who sent him. In these verses, the Father's love (and Jesus' love) are *conditioned* upon the person loving Jesus and obeying his teachings and commands.

Based on these scriptures and others that speak of God's conditional love, we can see that the antinomians, adherents to unconditional eternal security and all others who claim conduct does not matter to salvation, are people who do not love the LORD Jesus. How do we know this? Because they do not and will not obey his commands. They declare they are under grace, not law.

Can you hear the screams of protest? "What? You claim I don't love the LORD?"

Love for God is defined in Scripture: "This is love for God: to obey his commands" (1 John 5:3). The LORD Jesus said the same at John 14:15: "If you love me, you will obey my commands." According to the definitions in Scripture and John 14:24, people who do not and will not obey Jesus' commands do not love the LORD Jesus. They are in rebellion against him. They have concocted a false doctrine that claims they don't have to obey the LORD Jesus and can still be saved.

What happens to those who don't love the LORD and don't obey him? John 3:36 states,

"Anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment." (NLT)

See also the ASV and RSV translations. The RSV translates the last phrase as: "... he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him." The ESV, TLB and NIV state that "... God's wrath remains on him." Where is the unconditional love of God here? It

doesn't exist. For those who don't obey the Son, the wrath of God remains on them. (See Ephesians 2:3.)

These verses are extremely important. They expose the total falsity of the claims made by the antinomians who say they believe in God's Son, and thus assume they have eternal life. They claim that they don't need to obey the LORD Jesus because they are not under any law, thus admitting their lawlessness. But the translations cited above agree that "anyone who doesn't *obey* the Son will never experience eternal life."

The proper way to reconcile "believing and gaining eternal life" with "not obeying and remaining under God's wrath" is very simple. Those who believe will obey; those who claim to believe but do not obey, do not believe according to God's definition. We know they do not have a saving faith because obedience comes from a saving faith (Romans 1:5). Even the demons believe in God (James 2:19). Faith without deeds is dead (James 2:26).

Let's compare biblical definitions with secular dictionary definitions. The Bible is a unique, self-contained book. When lawyers interpret a contract, they must look "within the four corners of the document" – an expression commonly used in the legal community. Lawyers research the definition of terms and for an explanation of the document's provisions within the contract itself. If there is no evidence of the parties' intended meaning of a term or provision within the contract, the lawyers are allowed to search for its meaning elsewhere.

This same principle is true for the Bible because the definitions used in Scripture are not necessarily the definitions we'd find in a dictionary. For example, most of us have a sense of what it is to "love" someone, though our definitions vary. But what is love for God? Would you use your definition of love to describe love for God? If so, you would probably be wrong. Scripture tells us that: "This is love for God: to obey his commands" (1 John 5:3). Likely, none of our definitions that describe love for God would have been similar to God's definition. That is why Jesus

could say "If you love me, you will obey me" (John14:15). He knew that those who obey him are the ones who love him.

Just like the biblical meaning of love differs from its secular definition, the words "believe" and "faith" differ in the same way. The meaning of these words in Scripture is not mental assent – merely believing something to be true. Instead, at Romans 1:5, we learned that obedience comes from faith. The conditions we saw earlier, without which we cannot be saved, are instructions and standards of righteousness from God that were given to us by Jesus in his teachings and commands, all of which are to be obeyed. Because we are saved by grace, through faith, and this not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9), we know that when we find a scripture that says we must fulfill a condition in order to be saved, that condition must be part of a saving faith! Faith indeed is multifaceted – it is comprised of many elements. A non-biblical definition cannot begin to describe it.

How much of the multifaceted faith we examined do you think the LORD Jesus would find on the earth today? How would you answer Jesus' question at Luke 18:8, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" God's love is conditional, not unconditional. For a more thorough study see www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Is God's Love Unconditional?

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I'm Just a Sinner Saved by Grace.

A pastor might tell his congregation, "I'm just like you, a sinner saved by grace." Perhaps the pastor is seeking a common bond with those in his congregation.

Is there biblical truth to his claim? Not if the pastor is a committed Christian – a sinner is one who sins. Nowhere in the entire New Testament is a true follower of Jesus ever referred to as a “sinner,” nor is there any example of a person who is a sinner who is “saved.” Followers of Jesus will not be sinners; they will not continue in sin. That is not to say that followers of Jesus will never sin. Remember what the Apostle John said about continuing in sin? He said, “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him” (1 John 3:6).

When someone comes to faith in the LORD Jesus, he is a new creature. From that point on he is referred to as brother, saint, servant, slave, bondservant, bond-slave, etc., but never as a sinner.

You can understand how comforting such a phrase is to the antinomian who thinks he can freely sin because he believes salvation has nothing to do with his conduct. He knows he’s a sinner. For him, God’s grace is everything. Tozer rightly said, “Antinomianism is the doctrine of grace carried by uncorrected logic to the point of absurdity. It takes the teaching of justification by faith and twists it into deformity.”

To learn more about the issue of believers not being sinners, see www.bereanpublishers.com | Important Issues | Are Christians Sinners or Saints?

God Loves the Sinner, But Hates the Sin

Another expression that has come out of the antinomian doctrines is, “God loves the sinner, but hates the sin.” It is very important to the antinomian and the adherents of the unconditional eternal security doctrine that God love the sinner. They know they are sinners and believe that no real effort is necessary to be free of sin because they have falsely determined that conduct (sin) has no relevance on whether they will gain salvation.

Does God love the sinner? Let's see what Scripture says. At Psalm 5:4-6, David wrote, "You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you *hate* all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD *abhors*." This scripture plainly says that God hates all who do wrong and that the wicked cannot dwell with him. At Psalm 11:5, David wrote, "The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul *hates*." Hosea wrote, "Because of all their wickedness in Gilgal, I *hated* them there. Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of my house" (Hosea 9:15. See also Jeremiah 12:8). Does God change? Does he hate those who do evil in the Old Testament, but suddenly love them in the New Testament because some preachers decided to say he does? No, he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (See James 1:17 and Hebrews 13:8.)

Now it becomes easier to understand John 3:36 where Jesus said that God's wrath remains on those who refuse to obey God's Son – the LORD Jesus.

Peter contrasted the righteous and the wicked: "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12).

God hates those who are wicked – those who do not obey the teachings and commands of Jesus. What about those pastors and teachers who disobey Jesus' command to "teach them to obey all that I have commanded you?" (Matthew 28:20). Are they wicked? What about you and me?

Both Prospective and Past Sins Are Forgiven

Another phrase used by the antinomians and adherents to unconditional eternal security is, "When you repent of your sins, both prospective and past sins are forgiven."

Have you noticed how God's word preempts false doctrines by providing the truth ahead of time? The entire Bible is one consistent message from God – it explains itself. God spoke of the issue of forgiveness of past and prospective sins at 2 Peter 1:9: "But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his *past* sins." Yes, when we repent, we are cleansed from our *past* sins – the very sins of which we are repenting.

Further corroboration can be seen in the LORD Jesus' letters to the seven churches. To the church at Ephesus Jesus said to the church at Ephesus, "Remember the height from which you have fallen! *Repent* and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place" (Revelation 2:5). Jesus was writing to a church that had surely repented – if not, it would never have been called Jesus' church. If all prospective sins had already been forgiven, why would Jesus command the church to repent?

To the church at Pergamum, Jesus spoke of those advocating sexual immorality and those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans: "*Repent* therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Revelation 2:15-16). Why should they repent if their future sins have already been forgiven? They need to repent because their prospective sins have *not* been forgiven. Notice that Jesus commands repentance from false teachings that had come into the church.

We need to repent immediately each time we realize we have sinned. We will then be restored to being holy in God's sight – without blemish and free from accusation (Colossians 1:22).

As a final example, let's look at what Jesus said to the church at Thyatira:

“Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to *repent* of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they *repent* of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds” (Revelation 2:20-23).

In this passage, Jesus calls for Jezebel and those who commit adultery with her to repent. Jesus plainly states that he will punish those who continue in sin and will repay each according to their deeds. None of this would be true or possible if repentance were prospective. Jesus’ call to repentance proves that one can only repent of past sins, never prospective sins. Again, note that the repentance Jesus demands in this instance is from false teachings – like those exposed in this book.

Likely, this false claim results from misunderstanding the true definition of repentance. It is *not* simply feeling sorry for one’s sin and asking God’s forgiveness. It *is turning from the sin* and turning to God. Those who continue in sin have not truly repented, though they may have sought forgiveness. Repentance involves forsaking the sin, turning from it, and doing whatever is necessary to avoid repeating it. Is this possible with prospective sin? No, it is not. How can sin be forsaken if one doesn’t even know what the prospective sin is or will be? The notion of forgiveness of *prospective sin* through repentance violates the definition of repentance.

It is easy to see why prospective forgiveness of sins is so important to the antinomians and adherents of unconditional eternal security. They created a doctrine that will deal with future sin because they believe that a moment of faith is all they need in order to be eternally

secure. Dr. Stanley says that no future sin will compromise one's salvation if once saved. This false doctrine is based on the belief that a one-time confession and repentance of sins is sufficient to have forgiveness of both past and prospective sins.

You can see how one false doctrine leads to many other false doctrines.

Knowing what you know now about the importance of righteousness, you can see how Satan finds ways to oppose righteousness by infiltrating the church with false doctrines that teach that being righteous is not necessary, or better still, that it is impossible, or best of all, that our righteousness comes only through Jesus – an imputed righteousness that has nothing to do with our personal righteousness. Surveys show that many professing Christians live just as wickedly (unrighteously) as those in the world who make no profession of faith.

The great deceiver is always trying to deceive those who want to be loyal followers and disciples of the LORD Jesus. He wants them to believe the lie that personal righteousness does not affect one's salvation. He wants them to follow the ways of iniquity and unrighteousness. He wants them to become his followers – children of the devil. Tragically, in far too many cases, this is precisely what has happened.

Romans 7 Misunderstood

Many years ago when I was a new believer, some of us would go to breakfast after church. I raised the subject of the need for righteousness. I was immediately told, "We can't be righteous. We sin hundreds of times every day. All we have to do is ask God to forgive us. Even Paul said in Romans 7 that he continually sinned. Are we better than Paul?"

I already knew about 1 John 3:6, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either

seen him or known him," so I didn't buy into that response. It seemed to me that this person was badly mistaken. He was referring to Romans 7:14-24 where Paul said,

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate to do. ... As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now If I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (Romans 7:14-20).

I wondered if this is what Peter meant when he wrote about Paul's letters: "... His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

I knew that Paul could not possibly be confessing that as a Christian he was sold as a slave to sin. At Romans 6:15-18, Paul explained just the opposite:

"Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

These passages are significantly different. This latter passage is consistent with all we've seen about Jesus' call to righteousness and condemnation of those who are slaves

to sin. Here Paul says we are to be slaves to obedience, which leads to righteousness. Then he says to those receiving his letter, "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." But didn't Paul state that he was unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin? (Romans 7:14).

The difficulty is found in the verb usage. In the Romans 7 passage, Paul is using present-tense verbs that seem to indicate that he is presently in that condition. Let's take a closer look. In the Preface to *Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*, the translator tells us of a principle we should understand about Hebrew writers:

The Hebrews, in referring to events which might be either past or future were accustomed to act on the principle of transferring themselves mentally to the period and place of the events themselves, and were not content with coldly viewing them as those of a bygone or still coming time; hence *the very frequent use of the present tense* (emphasis added).

This is exactly what Paul did. He used present-tense verbs to describe his condition before coming to Christ. This scripture has caused much confusion because this is not the way we write or speak in Western society. Once we acknowledge this, the passage can be easily understood. Paul was talking about himself *before* coming to faith in Christ. Before knowing the LORD Jesus, Paul said of himself, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). But he answers his own question in the next verse: "Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our LORD!"

At Romans 8:1-2, Paul provides the solution to the problem he posed in Romans Chapter 7: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

There is even more evidence that the Romans 7 passage could not be referring to Paul's condition while serving the LORD Jesus. Paul recounted his life before the believers: Paul said that he has a "clear conscience" (2 Timothy 1:3), has "fought the good fight ... finished the race ... and kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). He said, "Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God" (2 Corinthians 1:12). "We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one" (2 Corinthians 7:2).

Paul set himself up as a model for others to follow: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice" (Philippians 4:9). "I plead with you, brothers, become like me" (Galatians 4:12). "I urge you to imitate me" (1 Corinthians 4:16). "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching" (2 Timothy 1:13). "Join with others in following my example, brothers" (Philippians 3:17). "For you yourselves know how *you ought to follow our example*. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but *in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow*" (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

As you can see, Paul's writings agree with this interpretation.

It is not surprising that the antinomians and unconditional eternal security adherents would try to find comfort in a wrong interpretation of that passage. They know full well that they live in sin, but because of their false interpretation of Scripture, they falsely claim that the Apostle Paul also lived in sin and had salvation; therefore, they, too, must be saved even in their sinful condition – as they believe Paul was.

For a more comprehensive study of Romans 7, please read my article "Romans 7 Revisited," at: www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Misunderstood | Romans 7 Revisited.

Conclusion

Is having assurance of salvation so difficult that it is almost impossible? Not at all. John assures us, "His commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Jesus promised, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30).

Jesus promised it was easy, but how can that be so with all the requirements that need to be met for salvation and the assurance of salvation?

It has to do with one's heart and faith. Ask yourself if the Christian faith is your fire insurance policy against hell? Is it a religion you will practice (at least nominally) to avoid eternal disaster? That is the attitude of those who want to keep one foot in each camp. Such a person doesn't want to give up the lusts, joys, fun and attractions of the world, but neither wants to lose the promise of heaven.

If this is the case, you will find it very difficult AND, sadly, you will likely have neither salvation nor assurance of salvation.

It is necessary to know God's requirements for salvation in order to satisfy them. Sadly, not every pastor is faithful to teach those requirements. I just spoke to a pastor whose congregation is comprised of senior citizens. When I learned the age of the congregation, I mentioned that it was a group that especially needed to hear the requirements of salvation as they are nearing the end of their lives. His response shocked me! He said, "No. They'd never be willing to [hear] that." He confessed, "My sermons are really fluff." I asked, "Why?" He said, "I just try to make them comfortable." I immediately thought of the scripture that warned:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

and they shall turn away their ears from the truth,
and shall be turned unto fables (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Have you heard from the pulpit in your church what you've read in this book?

Over the years, I've given much thought to false faith. It seems to range from mental assent – simply agreeing that something is true – to the false faiths claimed by the antinomians and those advocating unconditional eternal security.

Below is my condensed definition of a biblical saving faith:

A saving faith is faith in Christ Jesus as our LORD, which is proved by our obedience to his teachings and commands, by the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and by doing those works God prepared in advance for us to do.

We will be judged according to what we have done – our obedience, fruit and works – the evidence of our faith.

Impossible? Too hard? Not when you follow the LORD Jesus with a single-minded commitment, but impossible when you claim to follow Jesus, but also want to remain part of the world.

Remember James' warning, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). John spoke about the same problem, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

The true believer's whole life is to be centered on the LORD Jesus. Paul expressed it this way: "If we live, we live to the LORD; and if we die, we die to the LORD. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the LORD" (Romans 14:8).

Many of us who have made the commitment to follow Jesus thought long and hard before doing so. We knew our lives would change if we chose to follow Jesus. Likely most of us wondered how much of a sacrifice that would be. Though Scripture teaches us that we will suffer persecution because of our relationship with Jesus, that the world will hate us, and that even our families might be divided over it, we still made the commitment to follow Jesus. We finally decided that no matter how much the sacrifice, it was necessary because of who Jesus is – the KING of kings and the LORD of lords, and because of what he did – his sacrificial death on the cross so we could be reconciled to God.

Perhaps few of us realized the blessings we would receive as a result of that commitment. We could not have imagined the love and joy and peace we now experience, and the wonderful people the LORD brings into our lives. How could we have known the blessings the LORD would heap on us for helping others as we serve him?

It is my hope and prayer that you will have a single-minded commitment to Jesus as your LORD, that you will obey him the best you can all the time, and that you will stand firm to the end. Then – and only then – you can enjoy the assurance of salvation given to us by our Father in heaven through Jesus Christ our LORD.