

SAVING FAITH

What is it?

by

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Preamble

God created man in his image. Man was created perfect, but, unlike the animals God had earlier created, man was given much more, including reasoning and the ability to make choices. Adam and Eve soon exercised their choice and disobeyed God. Their disobedience – called sin – was handed down through all generations even to us. Scripture tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

God selected the Jews as his chosen people. God commanded them to sacrifice an animal when they sinned so that their sin might be covered and their relationship with him might be restored. God made plain that without the shedding of blood there could be no forgiveness of sins.

God entrusted the Jews with his Mosaic Law, and the writings of the prophets, the poets, and the historians of the Old Testament. Those writings prophesied hundreds of times about an Anointed One who would come and redeem his people from their sins.

Then the Bible tells us of a wonderful love story, how God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him would not perish – would not be subject to God's judgment for his sin – but would have everlasting life with God. God's only begotten Son is the prophesied Anointed One – the Messiah. Angels announced his birth, saying, "A Savior has been born unto you. He is Christ (the Anointed One) the Lord!" (Luke 2:11).

Scripture says that once we were alienated from God and were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior, but God reconciled us through Christ's (God's son's) physical body through death to present us holy in his sight, blameless and free from accusation, if we continue in the faith steadfast and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the Gospel. Yes, God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, willingly died in our stead – he shed his blood – so that our sins could be forgiven and so we could be reconciled to God.

God made it plain that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. God demonstrated his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That love demonstrates God's grace – his unmerited favor. We did nothing to deserve the wonder of God's great love or the sacrifice Jesus made of himself. That is pure grace – the gift of God. So it is said in Scripture that by grace are we saved, through faith, not of ourselves, it is a gift of God, not by works lest any man should boast.

Notwithstanding such a great gift and sacrifice, we learn from Scripture that most will reject the gift and choose to go their own way in rebellion against God. According to Scripture, the way to eternal life is narrow and few find it.

Scripture says we must receive this gift of salvation through faith. Just what is this faith that will cause us to gain eternal life? How can we be among the few to find the narrow way to salvation?

Saving faith is the subject of the following article – what God said he requires of us in order that we may be saved.

Saving Faith: What Is It?

Introduction

Considering that salvation is granted only to those with a saving faith, it would seem of ultimate importance that we correctly understand what it means to have a saving faith. As we proceed in this examination, however, you may be dismayed to find that your view of a saving faith is quite different than the biblical one. As usual, our study will be to determine what Scripture says.

This study deals only with faith, not works. But that does not prevent criticism from those who claim that anything but a simple faith is works. Paul taught the Ephesians, “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”¹ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Thus it is through faith we are saved, not by works!

What is the nature of a saving faith? Does it require only faith that something is true? Is it faith in someone? Could there be multiple requirements that are part of a saving faith? In this article, we will show that there are multiple, even many, necessary requirements included within a saving faith.

The entire concept of faith may be misunderstood by many, at least as it is taught and preached in the western world. What you read here may be threatening to you as you may find it contrary to what you have read and learned and heard from the pulpit of your church. But we are Bereans (Acts 17:11) who check the Scriptures to see if what is said is true. If you believe in the sanctity of Scripture, this study will be pleasing to you, as we will use only Scripture to describe a saving faith. We will not use elaborate arguments and reasoning to try to persuade to a particular point or doctrine. *Sola Scriptura* is our guide.

Are there tensions between various doctrines of Scripture? Many claim so. But I believe that when Scripture is correctly understood, doctrines fit together perfectly, without tension. As we go through this investigation of a saving faith, I’ll attempt to point out why tensions exist in some theological systems and why they do not exist when Scripture is correctly understood.

Finally, there are very popular doctrines that undermine and deny a biblical saving faith. We will examine these briefly so you will be aware of how they deviate from Scripture and can avoid being entrapped by them.

In examining a saving faith, not only must we determine what it means to “have faith” but also we must be sure we have the correct object of our faith. For example, to simply have faith that the sun will rise again tomorrow is obviously not the faith Scripture is speaking about that will result in salvation. Nor will faith in Abraham as the father of those who have faith be sufficient for salvation. Those are very obvious. This issue is very important and seems to be overlooked by many. We will examine it first.

The Object Of Our Faith – The Lord Jesus Christ

In studying this issue, we find an extremely important emphasis oftentimes overlooked, at least as it is often preached and taught. We know from Scripture that the only way to God the Father is through the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6). But in what capacity does God say we must believe in his Son? I submit there are several capacities in which Jesus is presented to us in the Scripture. He is called Lord, Christ, Son of Man, Teacher, Son of God, King, Lamb, Savior, the Word, Prophet, Master and High Priest. In each of these instances Jesus is presented in a different way. Which of his capacities is the one Scripture says we are to believe in him for salvation, and why? In truth, we are to believe in him in all his capacities, as he truly is and as

¹The Holy Bible: New International Version. 1984. Zondervan: Grand Rapids

he is revealed to us in Scripture. Jesus cannot be bifurcated, i.e., broken into different capacities so that we can choose which one we will accept and believe in.

Nevertheless, there is a primary capacity that Scripture insists be the foremost capacity of Jesus that must be recognized, received, and to which we must submit in order for us to have salvation. Paul told the Philippian jailor, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31). Which capacity did Paul use? It was Jesus as LORD! Let’s look at another explicit explanation by Paul: “. . . 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” (Romans 10:9). Which capacity? Again, it is Jesus as LORD!

Two titles of Jesus are used far more frequently than any others. They are Christ and Lord. The title Christ is used 543 times in the New Testament. Christ means Anointed One or Messiah. The Jews were looking for their Messiah, the Anointed One. The title Christ is used when Scripture is referring to his fulfillment of the many prophecies. The title Lord is used 618 times in the New Testament when referring to Jesus as one with great power and authority.

Strangely, when Jesus is spoken of in our churches it is more often as Savior. We are told to accept or receive or believe in him as Savior for our salvation. But there are NO scriptures that tell us to do that. In fact, the title Savior is used only 24 times in the New Testament. Of that number only 15 refer to Jesus as Savior; 9 refer to God the Father as Savior. Even the name Jesus means God saves. Primary verses such as John 3:16 and Colossians 1:21-23 refer to God the Father as primary in saving us. Amazingly, eighteen books in the New Testament do not refer to Jesus as Savior. Of course we are not saying that Jesus is not our Savior. He is, indeed. We could not be saved except for his willing sacrifice of himself on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. BUT, his capacity as Savior is NOT the one in which Scripture says we must believe in to have salvation.

There are no Scriptures that tell us to “accept” Jesus in any capacity. There are two that speak of “receiving” Jesus. The first is John 1:12: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” The concept of believing in someone’s name is foreign to the western mind, but it means to believe on all that his name implies, his authority, character, rank, majesty, power, and excellence. Without explicitly saying so, this Scripture certainly includes the titles of Jesus as King and Lord and King of kings and Lord of lords. The second use of the word “receive,” however, is explicit and corroborates the other New Testament teachings about salvation. Paul told the Colossians, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him . . .” (Colossians 2:6).

Perhaps you have heard many times the invitation to “invite Jesus into your heart.” In what capacity should we invite him into our heart? Peter tells us, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord” (1 Peter 3:15).

It is apparent from a study of New Testament scriptures that God intends us to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord if we would have salvation. Some examples follow:

Paul summed up his ministry to the Ephesian elders by saying, “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).

To the Corinthians Paul said, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Paul wrote the Thessalonians, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

To the Romans Paul explained, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Paul assured the Philippians, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ that 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). See also Romans 10:13, 14:9; Acts 10:36, 5:14, 9:42, 11:21, 16:15, 18:8, 20:21; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Peter 3:15; and Colossians 2:6-7).

John, in his Gospel, refers to Jesus thirty-seven times as Lord, but also six times as the Son of God. Are those equivalent titles? Paul declared that these titles are synonymous: “. . . and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:4). This is just a tiny sampling of the hundreds of times Jesus is referred to as Lord. For a thorough examination of this issue, please see my book *Saving Faith*, which can be found on the Internet at www.bereanpublishers.com | Book: Saving Faith | Chapter 2. You will find the evidence overwhelming that we are to receive Jesus as our Lord if we are to have salvation.

Paul made a statement that still amazes me, “For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living” (Romans 14:9). Is there tension between doctrines here? According to this statement by Paul, becoming our Lord was the primary reason Jesus died and rose from the dead. But wasn’t Jesus’ primary mission to seek and save what was lost? (Luke 19:10). Yes, indeed. The two scriptures come together without tension as we realize that Jesus saves only those for whom he is Lord. Another way of saying that is: Jesus is the Lord of all who will be saved.

Jesus Must Be Our Lord

The church often uses the title Lord when referring to Jesus, but then gives little evidence that they live with him as their Lord. What does it mean to live with Jesus as our Lord?

Imagine being before the most powerful person on earth, one who could do exactly as he wished and who could not be questioned about anything he chose to do. Assume for this purpose that this person was known to be just and not wicked. How would you behave if you were in front of such a person? Likely you would show great respect. Now suppose that person told you to do something. Would you do it? Likely you would be most eager to do it and you would do it to

the best of your ability. You likely would consider it an honor to be able to serve such a powerful, awesome person.

The Lord Jesus Christ is much more powerful than the most powerful earthly authority. He has more power and authority than we can imagine. Just before he ascended into heaven, Jesus revealed to us the magnitude of his power: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). Is there any authority Jesus does not have? No! He has **all** authority! Though the Apostle John was likely the closest to him when he was on earth, when John saw the Lord Jesus on the Isle of Patmos, he fell on his face as though dead (Revelation 1:17). When Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he fell down and was blinded for three days (Acts 9:3).

What is the natural and necessary response we must have if Jesus is our Lord? As we have seen, we would accord him great honor and respect. But our foremost response must be obedience. Paul taught that we are to conduct our daily lives as if we are serving the Lord: “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” (Ephesians 6:7) and “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. . . . whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:23-24, 19).

How would anyone dare to disobey one who has all power and authority in heaven and on earth? Wouldn't that be unthinkable? One would think so. But sadly, as we look about us – within the church – obedience seems to be an unwelcome option. Is it just an option? Is it possible to “believe in” Jesus as our Lord and not obey him and have salvation? If we insist that obedience to the Lord Jesus is necessary in order to be saved, have we just added works to faith? We know that is not so, again from Paul's explanation: 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 (Romans 1:5). Again we point to Ephesians 2:8-9 where we are saved by grace, through faith, not by works. In that verse Paul carefully distinguishes between faith and works. If it is faith, it is not works.

As Paul taught, obedience to Jesus as Lord comes from a true faith in Jesus as Lord. Anyone who is not obedient to Jesus as his Lord has not received him as Lord (see 1 John 3:6, 9). In Jesus' time here on earth, as the multitudes eagerly followed him, he asked, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? (Luke 6:46). Even then the people wanted to be healed and to hear, but without obeying his teachings and commands.

No one should claim that salvation is possible through obedience to or from any other of the elements we will discuss that pertain to salvation. Salvation is by faith. But as we have seen, true biblical faith includes obedience. The other elements come from obedience. What then is the purpose of obedience to the will of God? The purpose is two-fold. One is that obedience is the evidence that we have a saving faith. Paul spoke to that as he defended his ministry before King Agrippa: “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds” (Acts 26:19-20). The other purpose of obedience is to show our love for God and our Lord Jesus. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command 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 . . . 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” (John 14:15, 21, 23-24). Did you read that? God the Father loves those who obey Jesus. The Apostle John confirmed the love-obedience relationship when he wrote, “This is love for God: to obey his commands” (1 John 5:3).

God’s gift to us of the Holy Spirit results from that obedience that shows our love for Jesus. The Lord Jesus said, “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). Yes, the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey. In my case, I was flooded with the fruit of the Holy Spirit when I pledged to obey Jesus as my Lord for the rest of my life.² Peter confirmed the relationship of the Holy Spirit and obedience when he was defending the disciples before the Sanhedrin. Speaking of the Holy Spirit he said, “. . . the Holy Spirit, whom God has given those who obey him” (Acts 5:32).

How important is it to have the Holy Spirit? Paul warned, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9). It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to be disciples of the Lord Jesus, who empowers us to obey. Paul told of his impossible struggle as a Pharisee to obey God at Romans 7:14-25.³ In Romans 8, Paul rejoices over living in the law of the Spirit – being set free from the law of sin and death. When we are enabled by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle John’s encouragement comes true: “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world” (1 John 5:3).

We see the incredible importance of obedience when we recognize that Jesus confirmed that the first and greatest commandment is to love [obey] the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind (Matthew 22:37). It is said that in the treaty language familiar to the people in Jesus’ time (of the ancient Near East), the “love” owed to the king was a conventional term for total allegiance and implicit trust expressing itself in obedient service. That is the love Jesus expects from each and every one of us who claims Jesus as our Lord.

We see now the necessary relationship between obedience to Jesus and faith in Jesus as Lord. Obedience to the Lord Jesus follows naturally to those who truly receive Jesus as Lord.

Notwithstanding Paul’s explanation that such obedience comes from faith and Jesus saying that those who love him will obey him, there are those who claim that being obedient is attempting to be saved by works. They say that anything in addition to faith is works and is man’s attempt to save himself. But James taught the opposite, saying, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by

² You can read my testimony at www.bereanpublishers.com | Book: Saving Faith | Preface.

³ Paul’s story of his struggle is often misunderstood, likely mostly by those who do not have the Holy Spirit. They claim that is the struggle of the Christian life. See the article “Romans 7 Revisited” at www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Misunderstood

action, is dead (James 2:15-17). Such people are wrong. They pervert the Gospel and preach a dead faith. You will see many more proofs of this as we proceed.

The Centrality of Obedience

As we have already seen, if Jesus is our Lord, then obedience to the Lord Jesus is natural, just as disobedience should be unthinkable. What does Scripture teach about those who are disobedient? Paul answered that as he wrote the Thessalonian church: “He [the Lord Jesus] 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 1:8-9). Those who oppose obedience, claiming it to be works, do not know God and are disobedient to the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

The Apostle John wrote, “We know that 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) No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. . . . He who does what is sinful is of the devil No one who is born of God will continue to sin . . . (1 John 3:6, 8, 9).

The central importance of obedience as part of a saving faith, and as related to salvation, comes from Jesus’ teaching at Matthew 7:21: “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.” See also Romans 1:5, 16:26, 1 John 5:3, Luke 6:46, John 14:15, 21, 23, Hebrews 5:9, and Matthew 28:20.

We are not to mock Jesus by calling him Lord, but then disobeying what he commands us to do and failing to live the way he commands us to live. Even the very act of believing (having faith) in the Lord Jesus is obedience to God’s command, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (John 6:29).

The teaching at Matthew 7:21 brings up a necessary question, however. What is “the will of my Father who is in heaven” that we are to obey? God’s will for New Testament believers is everything that Jesus taught and did. How do we know that what Jesus said and did was the will of God? Jesus said, “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 12:49-50). Jesus told us repeatedly in the Gospel of John that everything he did and everything he said is just what God the Father told him to do and say (John 6:38, 7:16, 8:28, 14:10, 14:24, 14:31).

Scripture says that Jesus’ words are the words of God: Jesus told us, “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit” (John 3:34) and “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The **words** I [Jesus] have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). Simon Peter understood and said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Jesus said the man who puts his words into practice is like the wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24-28). Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

Jesus commanded us – his church – to teach new disciples to obey everything he had commanded (Matthew 28:20). The writer to the Hebrews linked obedience and salvation this way: “He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:9).

Just as obedience arises naturally from faith in the Lord Jesus, so all the other elements of a saving faith arise out of obedience, as they are individual commands or teachings or warnings. Most are a part of the teachings and commands of Jesus though some come later from the writers of the New Testament books following the Gospels.

The obedience that comes from faith in Jesus as our Lord includes with it all the other elements of a saving faith.

Faith Has Many Elements

Faith is usually presented as a simple, single-dimensioned faith. Receiving, believing in, and trusting Jesus as our Lord for our salvation could be considered a simple, single-dimensioned faith. But I believe it is much more accurate and easier to understand when we recognize that a true, saving faith has many elements to it. Such an understanding agrees with the teachings of Scripture.

We saw earlier that we are saved by grace, through faith, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). We also saw that only those are saved who do the will of our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21). We learned that we are not saved by faith plus obedience, but only by faith, as obedience comes from a saving faith (Romans 1:5).

There are additional teachings, commands, and warnings in Scripture that say we cannot have salvation (or enter heaven or have any inheritance in the kingdom of God) unless these things are obeyed. Are we speaking then of faith plus additional commands in order to have salvation? No! Each of such commands, teachings, or warnings is a necessary element of a saving faith and part of the obedience that comes from faith.

Let’s look at an example from law that shows how various elements must all be present in order to have a saving faith. Consider the definition of common law burglary: The breaking and entering of a dwelling house at night with the intent of committing a felony.

Note the elements present: breaking, entering, dwelling house, at night, intent of committing a felony. If any of those elements is not present, there is not a common-law burglary. For example, if a person breaks and enters a dwelling house in the daytime with the intent of committing a felony, has he committed a common law burglary? No. It was in the daytime, not at night. Suppose the man broke and entered a store at night with the intent of robbing it (a felony). Did he commit a common law burglary? No, it was a store, not a dwelling house. Thus it did not fulfill each of the necessary elements of a common law burglary. The same is true of each of the other elements of the definition of a burglary.

Let’s examine a saving faith in the same way. We should know by now that we are to have our faith in Jesus as our Lord and that we are to obey him, doing the will of our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21). Suppose we claim that Jesus is our Lord and that we have faith in him as our Lord but do not obey him and do not do the will of God? Do we have a saving faith? No! A

necessary element is missing – doing the will of God! How do we know we do not have a saving faith? Because Matthew 7:21 says, “only he who does the will of my Father in heaven [God] will enter the kingdom of heaven.” If we fail the condition, Scripture says we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. So it is with each additional element of a saving faith, both those given us by Jesus and subsequently by the New Testament writers. In each case, if we do not fulfill the condition, we will not have eternal life – salvation – because the scripture explicitly says so or it can be easily inferred.

There are at least fourteen additional elements of a saving faith as taught by Jesus, in addition to obedience, and many more by Paul and other writers of the New Testament, each of which must be fulfilled if we are to have salvation.

This may begin to sound overwhelming. How can anyone obey all these things? Is it even possible? Yes, we know it is possible because the Holy Spirit enables us. The Apostle John said these commands are not burdensome. So why do we feel the task will be so daunting? I think it speaks volumes about the present state of Christianity. It seems to me that most people have a Sunday Christianity, or perhaps even a Wednesday night added, but little else. Their life goes on in a usual schedule that includes little of the Lord. As Barna said, such people are little different than the people of the world who make no claim to be Christians. The problem for such people, is that true Christianity is radically different than the world. Christians are citizens of a different country whose King is the Lord Jesus. The rules for his kingdom are very different than the rules for the non-believing world. In order to be a follower – disciple – of the Lord Jesus, we truly must give up everything we have. That doesn't include just the physical things around us, but also our mental state – our feelings, desires, demands. The Christian doesn't live for self; he dies to self. Instead of living to satisfy his own desires, he lives to please his King, the Lord Jesus. The elements of a saving faith are simply Kingdom rules. If we are not willing to live according to the rules of the Kingdom, then we will not be accepted in that Kingdom.

Is the Gospel being presented truthfully when these elements of a saving faith are not told to people before they are asked to make a commitment to receive Jesus as their Lord? No. To fail to present the Kingdom rules necessary to qualify for God's great salvation is deceit or fraud.⁴ Jesus taught by parable that we are to reveal the costs to the would-be convert so he can determine if he is willing to pay the price. He said, “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). We see all around us people who were induced to accept the “free” gift of salvation [a false statement] who quickly fall away. While it is true that the Gospel is freely given, not everyone is willing to pay the price to qualify for the gift of salvation, as we will see from the elements of a saving faith listed below.

In every case, to qualify as an element of a saving faith, Scripture must define the element, its relationship to salvation, and state that obedience to the element is necessary in order for us to be saved. Paul's elements are usually associated with actions that are forbidden to members of the

⁴ See the articles “Fraud and Deceit in the Presentation of the Gospel” at www.bereanpublishers.com | Salvation Issues.

Kingdom. His warning is that those who do these things have no inheritance in the Kingdom of our Lord.

So far we have looked at only one element – the requirement of obedience. Scripture gives many more elements of a saving faith, each of which is necessary for us to fulfill if we would be saved. That statement may make you think that unless we live these requirements perfectly we cannot be saved. Fortunately for us all, that is not the case. Our Lord was tempted as we are but was without sin. But because he knows us, he has made provision for our failures. He tells us to repent when we fail – to turn from the sin and failure and turn to God.

But if you are tempted to think that you need not be careful to obey because you can simply confess your failures and sins and God is faithful and just to forgive, you are far from the Kingdom. You are still outside, trying to negotiate a compromise, seeing if you can live your way but still make it into heaven. It won't work! God knows the heart. Give up the world, your desires. Die to self. Then you will find it easy to live according to the rules of the Kingdom. It will give you great joy that you are pleasing to your King, the Lord Jesus.

Elements of a Saving Faith

Let's look first at the teachings and commands of Jesus in the Gospels and then other New Testament writers to learn the multiple elements – Kingdom rules – that are part of a saving faith. We'll begin the list by obedience. All the other elements can be considered individual teachings, commands, and warnings to be obeyed as part of the element of obedience.

Obedience to the will of God – Matthew 7:21, “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.”). The Apostle John wrote: We know that 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) . . . the world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:17).

Put Into Practice Jesus' Words – Matthew 7:24-27, “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.”

Born again – John 3:5-7, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’” Jesus told us how the new birth takes place: “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” (John 14:15-17. See also John 14:21, 23). Paul warned: If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). Peter said, “. . . the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32).

Believe That Jesus is Lord – John 8:24, “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.” Who did Jesus claim to be? “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am” (John 13:13).

Repent – Luke 13:3, “But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

Righteousness – Matthew 5:20, “For 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.”

Like a little child – Mark 10:15, “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Love Jesus More – Luke 14:26, “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.”

Carry Cross and Follow Jesus – Luke 14:27, “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Give Up Everything – Luke 14:33, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” The disciple is to be like his master. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus left his place with God to become a servant even unto death – giving up his place with the Father and even his life.

Forgive – Matthew 6:14-15, “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.” See Jesus’ parable at Matthew 18:21-35. The parable of the unmerciful, unforgiving servant ends like this: “In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (18:34-35).

Persevere to the End – Matthew 10:22, “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” See also Matthew 24:13, and Mark 13:13. The Apostle John wrote, “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) and “And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

Bear Fruit – John 15:1-4, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He 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. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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.” Jesus also told the following parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.⁷ 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?’⁸” ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it.⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down!’” (Luke 13:6-9).

Remain In Jesus – John 15:4-6, “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.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.”

Jesus reveals the above elements of a saving faith in his teachings and commands. He commanded his church to teach all new converts to obey all that he had commanded (Matthew 28:20). If our churches obeyed this command of their Lord, all people in the churches would be aware of these required elements of a saving faith.

Holiness – Hebrews 12:14, Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Be Conformed To The Likeness of Jesus – 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. The Apostle John stated, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did (1 John 2:6).

God used Paul to warn about behavior that was simply not acceptable in the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus. Consider the language he used:

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, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this [do such things] will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21, [KJV]).

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.⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Colossians 3:5-10. See also Romans 8:29).

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 offenders¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

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.⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them (Ephesians 6:3-7).

Finally, concluding Scripture, Jesus himself gave the final warning:

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 is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

Note how severe the language – those who conduct themselves this way have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God – because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur (a description of hell). Is there any way there can be any rational argument that this does not refer to loss of salvation for those who conduct themselves in these forbidden ways?

The Apostle John laid out many tests for the faith in his first epistle. Paul also 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 Corinthians 13:5). Let's use this occasion to test ourselves, as many of John's tests (those we will consider) are also elements of a saving faith.

Do Not Walk in Darkness – 1 John 1:6-7. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.⁷ But 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. Does anyone claim this is not a passage dealing with salvation? Consider again the words of the Lord Jesus in the Revelation: “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” (Revelation 21:8).

Not Without Sin – 1 John 1:8. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6).

Do Not Claim We Have Not Sinned – 1 John 1:10. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Obey His Commands – 1 John 2:3-4, 3:24. We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.⁴ The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. . . . 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. See also Matthew 7:21 and Hebrews 5:9.

Be Like Jesus – 1 John 2:6, 4:16-17. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. . . . 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.

Do Not Hate Your Brother – 1 John 2:9-11, 15. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹ 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. . . . Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Love Your Brother – 1 John 3:10, 14, 4:20-21. . . . nor is anyone [a child of God] who does not love his brother. . . . We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. . . . If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Love One Another – 1 John 4: 7, 12. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . . No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. What is the evidence that we love one another? This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands (1 John 5:2).

Do Not Love the World – 1 John 1:15-17. 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. James corroborated this teaching: 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).

Do What Is Right – 1 John 2:29, 3:7-8, 10. If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. . . . He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸ He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. What is the evidence that we are children of God? 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).

Be Pure – 1 John 3:2-3. We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Do Not Continue to Sin – 1 John 3:4-6, 9, 5:18. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that he 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. . . . 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. . . . We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin.

Retain the Gospel – 1 John 2:24-25. 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.²⁵ And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.

Share With Your Brother – 1 John 3:17-18. 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. . . . Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.¹⁶ If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:15-17).

Do Not Fear – 1 John 4:18. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Love God – 1 John 5:3. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world.

Believe Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God – 1 John 5:1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.³ This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Do Not Deny Jesus is the Christ – 1 John 2:22-23. 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.

Believe in Jesus, the Son of God – 1 John 5:10-12. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.¹¹ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

These nineteen tests of faith are all in 1 John. When John concluded those tests, he said, “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). Incredibly, people use just that verse, out of context, to say, “See this verse? You can know that you have salvation!” They fail to mention, however, that only those people who pass those nineteen (19) tests may be assured that they have eternal life. Each of those tests has associated with it dire results for those who do not pass the test, results that speak of a lack of salvation accompanying such failure. Sometimes the Apostle is very blunt: “He who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” On other occasions he said, “He who does what is sinful is of the devil” and “Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God.” Yes, one may be assured of salvation if one passes each and every test.

The argument is often made that Romans 8:29, which says that those God foreknew would be saved he predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus, refers to being conformed to the likeness of Jesus after death when the believer is in heaven. The Apostle John disabuses that misunderstanding when he says, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. . . . In this world we are like him.” Again God anticipated the argument and gave the answer. It is in this world we are to be like our Lord Jesus. Only those who are willing to be conformed to Jesus’ likeness are the ones God foreknew will be saved. God predestined the requirement for those who would be saved – they must be conformed to the likeness of his Son.

God anticipated further arguments to holiness and righteousness when he directed the Apostle John to write, “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world” (1 John 5:3-4). God gave us a clear definition of love for him – extremely different from the world’s definition and, sadly, very different from the explanation of love for God found in many Christian churches. Then God put to the lie the objection of many – that we can never obey, can never be righteous – by saying “His commands are not burdensome.” He further corroborates that in the next phrase as he assures us that “everyone born of God overcomes the world.”

All of the foregoing are part and parcel of a saving faith. All must be obeyed, though we must always remember that if (when) we stumble and disobey, we have the wonderful promise that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

The War Against Saving Faith

As you have finished the prior portion of this article, perhaps you can understand and empathize with Jesus’ query, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

It seems obvious that Jesus’ warning is truer than I ever guessed when he said, “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” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Have you ever heard or read that the elements listed above are all part of a saving faith? Aren’t all of them very plain in their language? Because Jesus commanded that you and I be taught to obey “everything he commanded” we must wonder why at least the fourteen elements of a saving faith taught by Jesus haven’t been taught to everyone in the church. Even if the entire remainder of the New Testament were ignored, surely the church would obey his command to teach you and me everything he commanded (Matthew 28:20).

But no, much of the church has ignored the clear command of its master, its King, the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ. What could have caused this? What strange perversion of Scripture would cause anyone who claimed to be Christian to ignore such a clear command to teach new disciples all that Jesus commanded? What perversion of reasoning could cause anyone to believe that these clear commands, warnings, and prohibitions do not apply to them?

We will examine theological teachings, some very popular, that teach doctrines that bypass, negate, and nullify the clear teachings of Jesus and the remainder of Scripture.

Calvinism

Calvinism is well known by its five points, often remembered by the acronym TULIP. A biblical study of Calvinism will reveal that all five points are false, notwithstanding elaborate arguments by Calvinists to the contrary. Calvinism is based on the teachings of Augustine of the third century. Augustine was noted for the false doctrines he introduced to the church. Prior to that time, the writings that have been preserved of the early church fathers show a close adherence to the biblical doctrines of the New Testament writers. Augustine is sometimes called the father of the Roman Catholic Church.

Perhaps Calvinism is best known for its doctrine of Predestination. That doctrine, as formulated by Calvin and subsequent Calvinists, states that before the foundation of the world God predestined certain individuals to be saved and others to be damned. In the Calvinist's view, the sovereignty of God can only be upheld if God is the author of every thought, every action, and every word. Thus, strangely, according to the Calvinists, God is the author of sin.

If you are not familiar with Calvinism, you are likely shocked that anyone could believe such horrid things that malign and slander the character of our just, righteous, holy, and loving God. Nonetheless, that is the teaching of Calvinism.

According to Calvinism, only the elect will be saved, though some may temporarily have the delusion (given them from God) that they are part of the elect and will be saved – something the Calvinists call evanescent grace. Further, Calvinists teach that even though members of the elect want nothing to do with God or with salvation, God will overwhelm their will with irresistible grace, regenerate them and give them the gift of faith. Naturally, according to Calvinism, if God has sovereignly elected a person to salvation, he will be saved, no matter what. Therefore neither his past nor future conduct will, or could, affect his salvation. Everything is dependent ONLY upon whether he is one of the elect.

None of the elements of a saving faith can have any effect upon the Calvinist. All the warnings about behavior that says a person engaging in it is subject to the wrath of God, that he will not inherit the Kingdom of God and of the Lord Jesus, or that he will be thrown into the lake of fire has no meaning for the Calvinist. Apparently they must refer to someone else. But whom?

That is not to say Calvinists are loose morally or wicked people. Rather just the contrary seems to be true in most cases. Because they don't know for sure if they're part of the elect, they do their best to appear good because Calvinism teaches that the elect show they are part of the elect by their actions. They have other strange beliefs – being baptized as an infant by an authorized person assures them of being part of the elect.

No one will know how many people have walked away from Christianity because of Calvinism. I am one who did. I finally left the faith when I was about 19 years old. I lost twenty-five years of my life during which I could have been serving the Lord because I was taught the doctrine of predestination. Even as a ten-year-old boy I knew there was no reason to concern myself with being saved. According to Calvinism, I was either going to be saved or I was going to be

damned to eternity in hell and there was nothing I could do about it either way. Behind my departure from the faith, though, was the belief that if there was a God, he couldn't be like the God of the Calvinists who for his pleasure and glory predestined billions to hell.

In an examination of each of the five points of Calvinism, there is extreme tension between what Scripture says and what the Calvinists say. Both cannot be right.

Eight articles proving Calvinism false can be found at www.bereanpublishers.com | False Doctrines | Calvinism. I have written three of the articles. David Kirkwood wrote an excellent, comprehensive article titled The Five Points of Calvinism Considered.

The Doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security

Likely this doctrine is the dominant false doctrine in the evangelical church in America and is often combined with one or more points of Calvinism. This doctrine says in brief that if one has once made a sincere declaration of faith one is immediately saved and cannot lose one's salvation. It is unconditional.

One stands in awe when hearing statements like this. What happened to all the teachings of Scripture that we recited above? What about all those warnings about actions that would lead to God's wrath, prohibit the person from inheriting the Kingdom of God, and cause the person to be thrown into hell?

The simple way around all the commands, requirements and warnings of Scripture is to hold to this doctrine. The doctrine conveniently teaches that once a person has prayed for forgiveness of sins, not only his past sins were forgiven but also his future sins – ALL his future sins were forgiven prospectively. Thus it is unnecessary for such a person to be concerned about warnings in Scripture for those who act wickedly. The people holding to this doctrine must think such warnings apply to someone else. But who? Those warnings were written to believers.

Can you see why George Barna's research of Christianity often concludes that much of the Christian community is no different than the worldly community around them? They are not distinguishable from the world. That should not be a surprise, considering the false teachings of this doctrine. In fact, Barna found that "Christians" in the Midwest and South, mainly from non-denominational and Baptist churches, have higher divorce rates than atheists, notwithstanding that Jesus forbade divorce among believers except for adultery.

Incredibly, while Scripture makes plain that there are many elements of a saving faith that must be observed for those who would be saved, the unconditional eternal security adherents preach that these warnings and conditions have only to do with how many rewards they will get in heaven or that failure to keep commands that prohibit certain actions will prevent them from experiencing the abundant life. I wondered about the strange emphasis we heard in a church about adultery hurting the children, the family and friends, but not a word about the spiritual impact, even though Scripture says that adulterers will never inherit the kingdom of God. In the same sermon, the same highly regarded pastor later referred to "Christian" adulterers and "Christian" homosexuals.

According to Dr. Charles Stanley, a leading proponent of the doctrine, the definition of unconditional eternal security is “eternal security is that work of God in which He guarantees that the gift of salvation once received is possessed forever and cannot be lost.”⁵

A reader unfamiliar with this doctrine may find it almost unbelievable that people would have created such a doctrine, recognizing immediately it is incompatible with the teachings of Scripture.

It is our usual policy not to mention people by name who have aberrant teachings, but rather only address the teaching itself. We make an exception in this case because this teacher is so vocal and his book *Eternal Security Can You Be Sure?*⁶ can be found in almost any Christian bookstore. Dr. Charles Stanley’s influence in the Christian church is immense. He was twice president of the Southern Baptist Convention. His international TV and radio program, “In Touch,” is broadcast throughout the world.

We said earlier that when teachings of Scripture are incorrectly interpreted, there are tensions that appear between doctrines. We will see much tension as we examine the teachings of Dr. Stanley. Paul and Jesus listed various sins and said that those who do these sins will not inherit the kingdom of God and will be thrown in the lake of burning sulphur. Dr. Stanley says:

“It is not lying, cheating, stealing, raping, murdering, or being unfaithful that sends people to hell.”⁷

Do you feel the tension? The Scriptures we looked at said the exact opposite. The writer to the Hebrews said that God will judge the adulterer. None of those Scriptures made any exceptions for those who claim to have once received the gift of salvation. Nor does Paul’s warning to 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. 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).

Isn’t Paul’s warning just the opposite of what Dr. Stanley claims? Paul warned us not to let anyone deceive you with empty words. Paul says it is because of such sins – immoral, impure, or greedy – that God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Is Dr. Stanley deceiving with 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 are right, why did Jesus give the following warning?

⁵ Stanley, Charles, “Eternal Security What Do We Have To Lose? Tape #6, MI090.

⁶ Stanley, Charles, *Eternal Security Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson, 1990),

⁷ Ibid, p. 70.

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 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 if 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.⁸ [Emphasis added.]

As you see from the prior quotation, those who subscribe to the eternal security doctrine will assure you that nothing you thereafter do will affect your salvation if you are certain that you once were rescued from a state of unforgiveness. According to Dr. Stanley, there are no sins that can affect your salvation, notwithstanding what Scripture says, notwithstanding that Paul warned both the Corinthians and the Galatians about sins that would prevent those practicing them from inheriting the kingdom of God, and notwithstanding that Jesus told the Apostle John about sins that would cause people to be condemned to hell. According to Dr. Stanley, none of those scriptures can pertain to those who once trusted in Jesus for forgiveness of sins and received the gift of salvation. The tension is extreme – Dr. Stanley's teaching is opposite the clear warnings of Scripture. One view is wrong. Is it Scripture or is it Dr. Stanley's teaching?

What should people conclude who accept the doctrine of unconditional eternal security? Is divorce a problem? Of course not. Adultery? How could it be? According to Dr. Stanley, if a person once received the gift of salvation and once was forgiven 100% of his/her sins, all future sins have also been forgiven and he/she cannot lose their salvation.

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

Dr. Stanley goes even further. He wrote:

⁸ Ibid, pages 79-80.

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?"

“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.”¹⁰ On other occasions he taught, “Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, his salvation is not in jeopardy”¹¹ and “. . . believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation . . .”¹² [Emphasis added.]

Dr. Stanley also claims:

“. . . God does not require a constant attitude of faith in order to be saved – only an act of faith.”¹³ He says, “It [saving faith] is a singular moment in time wherein we take what God has offered.”¹⁴ He wrote: “Faithful or not, every person who has at any time had saving faith is a permanent part of the body of Christ.”¹⁵ [Emphasis added.]

Such statements seem like ones that would be devised by demons. Scripture has a different message, emphasizing that it is continued faith and faithfulness that counts. The idea of a one-time commitment that saves 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). [Emphasis added.]

This scripture is especially important because Paul affirms that the Corinthians received the gospel, 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. To believe in vain is as if one had not believed at all. Such persons can have no salvation. As you would expect there is a great deal of tension between Dr. Stanley’s teaching and Scripture. Again, Paul’s warning is the exact opposite of the false assurances of Dr. Stanley (and the doctrine of unconditional eternal security).

Likewise, Paul’s warning to 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).

¹⁰ Ibid, page 74.

¹¹ Ibid, page 93.

¹² Ibid, page 94.

¹³ Supra 6, p. 80

¹⁴ Ibid, page 81.

¹⁵ Ibid, page 94.

The above is Paul's summary of the Gospel, of which he says he became a servant. All the good news of the Gospel is there, provided – the IF – you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. God requires much more from those he delivers from the kingdom of darkness into his glorious light than a momentary belief and confession of faith. Those who persevere will find their reward will be an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Those who rely for their salvation on a moment in time when they went forward, prayed for forgiveness of sins, and claimed the gift of salvation will be cast into the fiery lake of burning sulphur.

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”¹⁶ and “. . . there are Christians who show no evidence of their Christianity as well.”¹⁷ [Emphasis added.]

Jesus refuted such claims at John 15.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He 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. . . .

“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. 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, 5-6. See also Luke 13:6-7.)

Where are those branches? They are in Christ! God the Father cuts off those branches in Christ that bear no fruit. What is done with branches that do not bear fruit? They are cut off, thrown away and wither, then picked up and thrown into the fire and burned. Is there tension? Again we are faced with exact opposites – the teachings of Dr. Stanley versus the teachings, commands, and warnings of the Lord Jesus. Whose teachings will you choose to follow?

Is it any wonder Scripture teaches, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) and “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 Corinthians 13:5).

Christians are to have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Faced with opposite teachings such as those of Dr. Stanley, Christians need wisdom and discernment. All of us need Paul's prayer for the Philippian church:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and

¹⁶ Ibid, page 121.

¹⁷ Ibid, page 71.

blameless until the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:9-11).

God is loving, gracious and good. He is also holy and just. We are to fear him for his wrath and righteous judgment of those who refuse to obey him – those who continue in rebellion against him.

Some pastors who teach the doctrine of unconditional eternal security are concerned over the passivity of their congregations. They fail to understand they have put them to sleep under the spiritual narcotic of unconditional eternal security.

Naturally those with such a doctrine may mouth the Lordship of Jesus, but they can't truly insist on the need to live the Christian life with Jesus as Lord. To do that requires obedience to the Lord Jesus. The person who receives Jesus as his Lord will seek to be conformed to his likeness, to be wholly submitted to his authority, to be his faithful bondservant, to be holy, righteous, and pure. Those who have accepted the doctrine of unconditional eternal security have been assured over and over again that they are saved, that nothing can unsave them, and that all their future sins are forgiven. There is really no reason to disturb their comfort level. After all, getting to heaven is all that matters. The rewards really aren't that important.

Antinomianism

Dr. Stanley and the doctrine of eternal security teach that all future (prospective) sins are forgiven when a person repents and comes to faith. The doctrine requires it. But there are no teachings in Scripture that say that repentance causes future sins to be forgiven. Consider Peter's warning:

But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins (2 Peter 1:9).

Past sins? Yes, when we come to a saving faith and repent of our sins, it is our past sins that are forgiven. At the moment of our conversion 100% of our past sins are forgiven. In his letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus commanded five of the seven churches to repent. Why would they need to repent if all future sins were forgiven? They wouldn't of course. It is a false gospel that teaches that all future sins are forgiven if once one's sins are forgiven. Once again, there is extreme tension between the doctrine of unconditional eternal security and the Scripture. Scripture teaches that when we sin we are to repent immediately. Followers of the Lord Jesus want to be pure before him. That can only happen when our sins are forgiven. Our sins alienate us from God. When we repent of our sins we are reconciled to God. Scripture says then we can be holy in his sight, blameless and free from accusation (Colossians 1:22).

As you can readily see, the foregoing doctrines of Calvinism and Unconditional Eternal Security lead to lawlessness. Antinomianism means lawlessness. According to the followers of these false doctrines, there is no need to be concerned about following the laws of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus when all violations of that law have already been forgiven in advance. I have observed that often the only law that teachers of those false doctrines refer to is the "royal law" in James, i.e., to love your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8). Naturally they avoid Christ's law

(1 Corinthians 9:21) and ignore Jesus' command to teach new believers to obey everything he commanded (Matthew 28:20).

There is no need for such churches to teach their congregations to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus. After all, all but a few have already made a confession of faith and are already saved (and can't be unsaved) and are already forgiven prospectively of any violations or breaches of the teachings and commands of the Lord Jesus.

Almost invariably such churches emphasize the cross and forgiveness of sins. They speak of Jesus as Savior and of the free gift of eternal life. They fail to warn of sinful, wicked acts that Scripture says will prohibit entry into the Kingdom. They fail to teach that the gift of salvation is the most expensive gift you will ever receive – it will cost everything you have (Luke 14:33).

When Satan tempted Jesus in the desert, he spoke some Biblical truths. But he did not tell the whole truth and so attempted to deceive. Likewise, the antinomians speak some truth, but fail to preach the whole gospel, thus badly deceiving those who hear them. Calvinism and those teaching the doctrine of unconditional eternal security will doubtless be responsible for hundreds of millions of souls being in hell.

One can almost imagine a conference called by Satan of his chief demon henchmen. They discussed the best ways to frustrate and overturn the church of Jesus Christ and to cause those to lose their salvation who had left the world to follow Jesus as their Lord. Doubtless there was much rejoicing in that demon kingdom when someone suggested recruiting teachers who would claim that if they once confessed faith in Jesus as their Savior, all future sins would be forgiven, no matter how much they sinned and no matter what sin they committed, though some expressed considerable doubt that anyone would believe that, considering what Scripture had to say on the subject. Others suggested that these teachers claim that if a person once confessed faith, that person could never lose his salvation. Again there were doubters who said Scripture was too clear that a person must persevere in the faith in order to be saved. Others, however, said the key was to take over seminaries to train and recruit excellent, smooth-talking speakers who would attract large numbers of followers. They said that such people would just believe the teachers and not feel the need to check the Scripture and thus would believe these false doctrines. Others said such speakers must be given much success. They should be put on TV and radio so their false teachings could be disseminated throughout the world. And so it happened. The ploy succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of the demon world. Millions upon millions of those just beginning to follow the Lord Jesus were deceived. Peter spoke of just such a situation:

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 20-22).

Will you follow the lawlessness permitted by false doctrines? Or will you seek to submit in all ways to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and submit to the law of Christ, seeking to obey it as best

you can? Will you repent each time as you break that law, each time turning from the sin and seeking to live a life pleasing to the Lord who is your Master and God?

Dispensationalism

Another convenient way to get around obeying the Law of Christ and Jesus' command to teach new disciples to obey his commands is to claim they don't apply to you and others like you.

In a wonderfully convenient approach, some of the teachers of dispensationalism say that Jesus' teachings apply only to the Jews. It is Paul's teachings, they say, that apply to the Gentiles. They claim we are under a different dispensation. Their claim is false!

In one easy swipe they discard all the teachings of Jesus, notwithstanding that it was Jesus who said to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that he commanded them (Matthew 28:19-20). They do this notwithstanding that the Apostle Paul said that he was under the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21). These false teachers seek to nullify the great commission; they prevent those who follow their teachings from becoming true followers of the Lord Jesus. The true follower of the Lord Jesus is necessarily obedient to his teachings and commands.

The Scripture never uses the word dispensation. It is a concept created by man, though behind it we can imagine the creative genius of the demons. It is a concept that, like the other false doctrines, causes an opposite result to that taught by Jesus and thus will deprive those who accept it of salvation.

How will believing this cause loss of salvation? We have seen there are many elements of a saving faith taught by Jesus. If a person is taught, and comes to believe, that none of the teachings of Jesus apply to him, he is most unlikely to be obedient to those teachings and commands.

Jesus warned that only those who do the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven. We have also learned that everything that Jesus said and did is the will of the Father. Any system of theology that declares Jesus' teachings and commands as not appropriate for Gentiles because they were for another dispensation have created an insurmountable tension – their man-made doctrine against the clear teachings of Scripture.

Arbitrary Claims To Deny Teachings of Jesus

Another arbitrary claim that flies in the face of the teachings of Jesus is the claim that the term "disciple" has nothing to do with salvation, but that a disciple is one who wants to go higher (or deeper) in their Christian walk.

This is a very important issue as several of the elements of a saving faith, as given by Jesus, have to do with requirements that we love him more than anyone else and even our very self, that we must take up our cross and follow him, and that we must give up everything we have. Jesus said that unless we do each of them, we cannot be his disciples.

The Lord Jesus apparently expected that all those who received him as their Lord would be his disciples. Jesus' command in the great commission was to make disciples, not converts. He never suggested, nor does Scripture say so elsewhere, that there is any difference between those who are his disciples and those who will be saved.

This is yet another example of a teaching devised by those who refuse submission to Jesus as their Lord and to being his disciple. This doctrine offers a false salvation for those who claim salvation without being disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Tension? Of course there is. This doctrine claims Jesus' teachings and commands that say we can't be his disciples unless we obey them doesn't matter to those who just want to be saved, who don't want to go further and be a disciple. Jesus says they are intended for everyone, for all nations. He instructs us to make disciples. Who will you believe?

Conclusion

Paul warned Timothy "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 4:3-4). It would appear we are seeing this fulfilled, perhaps as never before, in our own time.

Jesus asked, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). What a tragic question for him to ask! But we see God's foreknowledge presented in his question.

Today we find Jesus' capacity as Savior emphasized with the false claim that those who believe on him (or accept him or receive him) as Savior will have eternal life – a claim we have seen is without warrant in Scripture.

Today Jesus is often called "Lord," but there is an almost total failure to present the necessity of obedience to him as Lord, and the church itself fails and refuses to teach new converts to obey all that Jesus commanded, though explicitly commanded by Jesus (at Matthew 28:20), as part of his great commission to the church.

Belief systems such as Calvinism have become powerful forces in perverting the Gospel, redefining words, stripping man of free will, slandering God by attributing each act and thought of each person to God's sovereignty, thus making God the author of sin and evil.

Likewise the popular belief system of Unconditional Eternal Security redefines the plain statements of Scripture, and disregards and negates huge portions of Scripture all to uphold their false beliefs.

The theological system of dispensationalism has sometimes been used to negate everything Jesus taught, falsely claiming Jesus' teachings and commands pertain only to the Jews.

God's Kingdom rules – elements of a saving faith – for those who would be disciples of Jesus are perverted by those who claim one can gain salvation without being a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Antinomianism (lawlessness) is rampant within the church. Rather than associating sinning with the devil and loss of salvation, the doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security claims all prospective sin has been forgiven and that sin only lessens the blessings to be received in heaven and the abundant life otherwise available here on earth.

The troubled, wicked Corinthian church is a model of the church of today. And Paul's observation of them is certainly applicable to the church of the 20th and 21st century: "For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough" (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Today's church preaches a different Gospel than that revealed by the Lord Jesus. It preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus of Scripture that Paul preached. Does today's church even know what spirit they have, that it is a spirit of deception? Once again, Scripture is fulfilled before our eyes. Jesus prophesied, "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people" (Matthew 24:10-11). As we have seen, deception is rampant.

Peter also warned, "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute" (2 Peter 2:1-2). Doesn't that describe the false teachers who have introduced Calvinism and the doctrine of unconditional eternal security? They have introduced destructive heresies that will deny salvation to untold millions. The way of truth is in disrepute. They deny that Jesus must be Lord, saying, "Believe in Jesus as your Savior and you will be saved." Many Christians are indistinguishable from the world — and are thought of as hypocrites by the world.

A revival is needed to restore the understanding and acceptance of a biblical, saving faith. This is faith that is costly, life changing, and promises salvation. It is rooted and grounded on the rock – the Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to his words (Matthew 7:24-27). It is enabled and empowered by his teachings and commands as the Holy Spirit quickens them to the hearts of true believers. (See John 14:15, 21, 23; Acts 5:32).

All this may seem extremely difficult to those who seek to put the new wine of the Gospel into the old wine skins of their old lives or seek to add being a follower of Jesus as a patch onto the garment of their present way of life (Matthew 9:16-17). That is not only difficult, it is impossible. The true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17. See also Galatians 6:15). For such a new creature, the Apostle John assures us, "His commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Following the Lord Jesus will never work if we seek to follow two masters. We seem to live in a time when many professing Christians love the world. But James said, "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). Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and

despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). From the false doctrines we have examined, it would appear that many have chosen to hate the Lord Jesus.

Jesus alone must be our Master, King, and Lord. What are our priorities if Jesus is our Lord? “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). We are to be his bondservants – bondslaves – who were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, 2 Peter 2:1). Bondslaves have only the good of their Master at heart, seeking to please him in all they do. May that be our goal and prayer, and may our lives show our love and devotion to our Master so we may draw others to a saving faith in our King – the Lord Jesus.