

THE MANY FACETS OF A SAVING FAITH

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Introduction

The western world, in particular, is in a widespread state of unbelief (or delusion) as to the biblical view of a saving faith. The great hue and cry of most churches is "We are saved by grace!" But few seem to understand exactly what the grace is that Paul refers to in Ephesians 2:8. To discuss that for a moment, let's look at the whole passage:

⁸ 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. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:8-10).¹

¹*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1984 (Eph 2:8-10). Zondervan: Grand Rapids

The emphasis in the presentation of salvation today seems to be the underlined portions above, i.e., we are saved by grace and it is the gift of God. Often the gratuitous word “free” is added before the word gift, so that it becomes the “free gift” of God. Scripture explains the word “gift” in Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Just what is the “grace” that Paul speaks about? A common definition of grace is “unmerited favor.” Paul illustrates unmerited favor for us in his letter to the Romans at 5:6-8:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

All of us are living approximately 2000 years after Jesus died on a cross. God showed his love for us in this great sacrifice before we could even know our need for a redeemer to reconcile us to God. That is the grace and gift to which Paul refers – God’s plan to reconcile us to himself through Jesus’ atoning death on the cross (Colossians 1:21-22).

Error Introduced

The wrongful emphasis on grace caused the introduction of serious error into the church. If salvation is all about God’s grace, then how is salvation obtained? The easy buzz-word in the church today is, “All you have to do is accept God’s (free) gift! Accept Jesus as your Savior and you will have eternal life.” Wouldn’t it be nice if that were true? Or would it? If that were all there were to gaining salvation, the world would hardly know there were Christians because the “Christians” would hardly differ from the non-Christians.

Sadly, the truth is that professing Christians are hardly recognizable from non-Christians today! To understand the truth of that assertion, let’s consider just the issue of divorce. Jesus said divorce was only permitted in case of infidelity. Nevertheless, the Barna Research Group found that **professing Christians had moderately higher rates of divorce than the general population**, including atheists and agnostics. Looking at the statistics more closely shows even more surprising trends: 27% of those describing themselves as “born-again Christians” are previously or currently divorced compared to 24% of the general population. But in the Baptist and nondenominational Protestant churches which dominate the Bible Belt in the U.S., 29% and 35% were divorced, more than any other Christian denomination.²

Barna’s research also showed that 85% of Americans identify themselves as Christians. Yet, by a 3 to 1 margin (64% vs. 22%) adults said truth is always relative to the person and their situation; 83% of teenagers thought truth was relative. The surveys also asked people to indicate the basis on which they make their moral and ethical decisions. By far the most common basis for moral decision-making was doing whatever feels right or comfortable in a situation. Nearly four out of ten teens (38%) and three out of ten adults (31%) described that as their primary consideration.

² Glenn Stanton, “Divorce: Bible Belt Style,” Citizen Magazine (June, 2000), page 19.

Scripture says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 14:8). Jesus said that he himself is the truth (John 14:6). Everything Jesus said and did was what God the Father told him to do and say. Does that sound as if truth – real truth – is relative? Of course not! Real truth is as unchanging as Jesus Christ himself.

Barna also found that among adults, only 13% said they made decisions on the basis of principles taught in the Bible. Teenagers fared even worse; only 7% of teenagers said their moral choices were based on biblical principles.

Consider how incredible such percentages are, when 85% of people claim to be Christians, but only 13% make decisions based on principles taught in the Bible. Is the church doing its job? Jesus commanded the church to teach new disciples to obey all his commands.

It is my contention that the results cited above are possible only because of the pervasive, wrongful emphasis on salvation by grace.

Salvation by Grace, Through Faith

The missed portion of God's message of salvation seems to be the part that salvation is through faith. As we have already seen, salvation is only possible by God's grace – the atoning death of Jesus to take away the sins of the world.

However, not only is the faith portion missed, it is often misrepresented and misunderstood. So let's find out just what the Scripture says about the many facets of the faith that saves. I'd like you to think about a saving faith as you would about a diamond. When you look closely at a diamond, you see many facets that reflect the light. You are only looking at one diamond, yet there are many facets. Each facet of the diamond can be examined separately. So it is with a saving faith. We are saved through faith, but that faith has many facets that can be separately identified, studied, and understood.

To do that let's start with the most familiar of all salvation passages:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Here God limits salvation to those who believe in his Son. Earlier the Apostle John stated another salvation passage: But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12). In that passage, note that the capacity in which we are to receive him is not specified. Scripture tells us how Jesus is "received" at Colossians 3:6: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord . . ." We find the Colossians received Jesus **as Lord!** There is no conflict between salvation through the Son of God and the Lord Jesus. Romans 1:4 states, "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." The Son of God is the Lord Jesus.

One of the most familiar passages explicitly dealing with how to be saved is Romans 10:9:

That 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.

Here we find confessing Jesus as Lord as a requirement of salvation. Just a couple of verses later, Paul again emphasizes Jesus’ Lordship: “Everyone who calls on the name of the **Lord** will be saved” (Romans 10:13). When Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailor how to be saved, they said: “Believe in the **Lord** Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

It was to the Ephesians that Paul wrote, “For you are saved by grace, through faith . . .” (Ephesians 2:8). Consider Paul’s last dialogue with the Ephesian elders. He said, “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). Thus, by combining the two passages, the verses at Ephesians 2:8-9 could be written, “For you are saved by grace, through faith in our **Lord Jesus**, not of yourselves, it is a gift of God.” Now we see clearly that it is through faith in our Lord Jesus that we are saved.

It should be noted that there are NO passages in all of Scripture that say we can believe in, have faith in, accept, or receive Jesus as Savior and be saved. NONE! Isn’t it strange that we hear from our pulpits in America, “Accept (or receive) Jesus as your Savior and you will have eternal life!”

Peter said, “In your hearts set apart Christ **as Lord**.” (1 Peter 3:15). Paul taught, “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).

What did Paul say was the message of the early church? “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ **as Lord**, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). And so the Scriptures prove. Jesus is referred to **as Lord** 624 times in the New Testament. He is called Savior only 16 times. Eight times God the Father is referred to as Savior.

Just remember this: “Jesus Christ is Savior of all those for whom he is Lord.” Or, you could say, “Jesus Christ will be Lord of all those who will be saved.”

Shouldn’t this article end right here? Didn’t Romans 10:8-9 say that all we had to do was confess Jesus as Lord, believe that God raised him from the dead and we’ll be saved? Yes, indeed, that is what it said. But if Jesus is LORD, then it is an oxymoron to confess him as Lord and not obey him. We will be looking at what Jesus commanded us to do, or not do, with respect to salvation. Our faith in Jesus is in him as our LORD!

The Necessity of Obedience

Now we are going to look at several passages that declare that unless this or that is done, or not done (whatever is specified), a person cannot have salvation. Because we know we are saved “through faith”, we know that each such instance must be a facet of a saving faith. The saving faith must include this. Obedience is one of those facets.

To prove the point that obedience is part of a saving faith (just as each facet of a diamond is part of the diamond, let's look at Paul's mission statement: "Through him [Jesus Christ our Lord] 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).

How do we know that obedience is essential to salvation? Jesus warned:

"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).

Those who do not do the will of the Father will not be saved. Lest there be any question about that, Jesus continued with one of the most frightening passages in all of Scripture:

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).

These people called Jesus Lord. They prophesied, drove out demons, and performed miracles, all in Jesus' name. Yet he rejected them, saying he never knew them. How can that be? It is because they did not do the will of God; Jesus called them evildoers. Calling Jesus Lord is not enough. He must be our Lord. If he is our Lord, we will obey him.

Believe Jesus Is Who He Says He Is

Jesus said, "If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24).

Who did Jesus claim to be? He said, "You call me Teacher and **Lord**, and you are right, for so I am" (John 13:13). Jesus also described his Lordship: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8).

So far we see that a saving faith believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord (and believes Jesus is who he says he is)!

The Will of God

That should immediately bring to your mind the question, "What is the will of God that I must obey?" For the believer in the Lord Jesus, that question is answered in the Gospel of John and the great commission at the end of Matthew. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly asserts that everything he said and did is what God, his Father, told him to say and do (e.g., John 12:49-50, 14:10, 24, 31). Thus EVERYTHING Jesus did and said is the will of God. Now we can see why John said, "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 2:4).

Jesus directly commanded what we are to obey by his commission to his disciples at the end of his ministry: "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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus emphasized obeying his commands two more times in John 14: “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. 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 14:21, 23-24). In John 15, he added two more references to obedience to his commands: “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” (John 15:10), and “You are my friends if you do what I command” (John 15:14).

What are we to obey? Everything Jesus taught and commanded his disciples. And we are commanded by Jesus to teach new believers to obey those teachings and commands.

Mathew recorded an instance where Jesus emphasized obedience to his words and related it to salvation: “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. 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. 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. 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).

Can we have salvation if we claim Jesus as our Lord and do not obey him? The Apostle John wrote, “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 2:4). Paul warned, “He [God] will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our **Lord** Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the **Lord**” (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

We can now conclude that a person with a saving faith believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, and obeys his teachings and commands.

We Must Be Born Again

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to inquire of him, Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). What a surprising thing to say. What does it mean?

Jesus continued, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8).

How are we to be born again? Jesus told us: “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).

Is it important to have the Holy Spirit and be born again? Jesus said no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Paul answered that as well: “And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” (Romans 8:9).

When we are born again, we begin anew. This is what Paul meant when he said, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17).

We see that a person with a saving faith believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, obeys his teachings and commands and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Repent!

Jesus warned, “But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:3, 5).

Repentance defined: In the New Testament the notion of repentance as **turning** to the Lord (Heb. *shub*) is expressed in the Greek verb *metanoein*. The idea is slightly modified, however, inasmuch as the Greek includes the concept of **changing one’s mind, coming to a new way of thinking**.

Jesus’ call to repentance is also closely linked to the arrival of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). The summons to conversion, moreover, is associated with his own person so that a decision for or against him signifies a choice for or against repentance (Matt. 11:20-24; 12:41-42).³

I summarize the meaning of repentance as turning from sin and turning to the Lord Jesus.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter told the Jews, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38).

We can now conclude that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, obeys his teachings and commands and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Does Not Continue In Sin

Paul instructed the Galatians:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did

³Achtmeier, P. J. 1985; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *Harper's Bible dictionary* (electronic ed.) (Page 862). Harper & Row: San Francisco

before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God
(Galatians 5:19-21).

The Corinthians were similarly warned:

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 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; see also Col. 3:5-10).

The Lord Jesus told the Apostle John about the punishment of the wicked:

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

To the Galatians, Paul implies a continuing type of offense when he says “live like this.” In the second, to the Corinthians, he refers to people who do the things he recites as wicked, saying they will not inherit the kingdom of God. Lest there is any question about what it means to not inherit the kingdom of God, Jesus recited the same kinds of sins and said that the place for the people who do them will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Neither those who continue in sin or the wicked have salvation. John confirmed this when he wrote, “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).

We can now understand that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, obeys his teachings and commands and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Holy

The writer to the Hebrews recited this salvation requirement of a saving faith:

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).

What does it mean to be holy? Is it another meaning for righteous? In Scripture, holiness means separation, and the term is used with reference to persons or things that have been separated or set apart for God and his service.⁴

Peter commanded:

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:14-16).

⁴Douglas, J. 1982; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *New Bible Dictionary*. Includes index. (electronic ed. of 2nd ed.) . Tyndale House: Wheaton, IL

Peter tells us why we are to be holy. We are to be obedient children of God. Our Father is holy so we must be holy.

Through God's foreknowledge (1 Peter 1:1-2) we were chosen by God to be holy and blameless before him (Ephesians 1:4). Paul reinforced that teaching: 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).

We now know that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, obeys his teachings and commands, is holy, and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Be Righteous

The requirement for righteousness as part of a saving faith comes from our Lord himself as he compared those in his kingdom with the religious leaders of the Jews – the Pharisees and the teachers of the law:

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 (Matthew 5:20).

From that scripture we must ask, "How righteous were the Pharisees and the teachers of the law?" They were scrupulous in their observance of the Old Testament Law. They had devised rules and regulations for how the Sabbath was to be observed, far beyond God's requirements. While practicing the smallest details of the law, the Pharisees and teachers of the law missed the big picture – the important thing God really wanted.

What was the most important thing God wanted? We find that out in an unusual exchange between the crowd and Jesus. They asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires? (John 6:28). Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). This one and most important work the Pharisees and teachers of the law were unwilling to do – to have faith in the Lord Jesus.

Paul explained the connection between faith and righteousness:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes **through faith in Jesus Christ** to all who believe (Romans 3:21-22).

This is called imputed righteousness. It is a righteousness with which true believers are clothed by God, the righteousness of Jesus. When God looks at the true believer, he sees them as righteous through their faith in the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps the best example of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and teachers of the law is given by Jesus as he rebuked them:

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone” (Luke 11:42).

Jesus referred to the Pharisees practice of meticulously fulfilling the tithe requirement by giving even a tenth of their garden herbs. Yet they missed the big picture -- the love of God in the person of Jesus Christ in whom they would not believe.

But the Apostle John defines righteousness differently 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). When we look at John’s definition, he is not speaking of imputed righteousness, but rather of practical righteousness that results from doing what is right.

The Apostle John confirmed that righteousness is a salvation issue. He said, “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).

If we were to rank righteousness, just how important would it be? Jesus said to seek **first** his kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

We can thus conclude that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, obeys his teachings and commands, is holy and righteous, and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Love Jesus More Than All Others

Jesus taught,

“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” (Luke 14:26).

Jesus requires absolute loyalty from those who come to him and for whom he is Lord. Our care and concern and love for others must be almost like hate in contrast to the love we have for the Lord Jesus. This is a foreign concept to westerners. We are not used to Kings to whom we are to swear loyalty. A note in the NIV study Bible says that love for the great King (in the treaty language of the Near East) was a conventional term for total allegiance and implicit trust expressing itself in obedient service.

King Jesus is much more than other kings. He is always just, and he has shown immeasurable love for his subjects by dying for them. He is also the Son of God and Lord of all. There is no authority to compare with his. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Matthew 28:18).

We now know that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is,

loves him above all others, obeys his teachings and commands, is holy and righteous, and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Love our Brothers

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble (1 John 2:9-10).

Those who are in Jesus, who have a saving faith, are said to be the light of the world. But John says that anyone who hates his brother may claim to be in the light but is still in the darkness. Those who love their brothers, however, live in the light. John explained, “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth” (1 John 1:6).

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).

Loving one another is not only a command of the Lord Jesus, but also an identifying characteristic of those who are his disciples. When the Apostle John was writing his epistle, he assured his readers that this was not a new command: “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another” (1 John 3:11). John summarized God’s command to his children this way: “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us” (1 John 3:23).

We have found that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, loves him above all others, obeys his teachings and commands, loves his brothers, is holy and righteous, and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

We Must Carry Our Cross and Follow Jesus

Jesus insisted,

And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27).

Jesus died on a cross. Crosses were made to cause people to die a horrible death. When we are enjoined by Jesus to carry our cross, it means we are to die – to self. It is to be the death of our self-life and sin – the death of a life devoted to the interests of the flesh.

Paul explained it this way: For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,^a that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone

who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:6-7). What's next, after being freed from sin? He is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We have learned that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, loves him above all others, takes up his cross and follows Jesus, obeys his teachings and commands, is holy and righteous, and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Give Up Everything!

This command of Christ may seem radical to many who know about it, though I suspect many professing Christians are not even aware of this condition to discipleship and salvation:

In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

There are those who likely will try to wriggle out of these clear, unambiguous scriptures that deal with being a disciple of Jesus by saying that salvation has nothing to do with being a disciple. That would be the ultimate perversion of Scripture. Remember that Jesus' command to his disciples as he left the earth – their marching orders – was to go and make disciples of all nations. Only disciples of Jesus have salvation.

Why and how should we give up everything we have? Aren't we free, independent people who have the right to own and possess the things we have? Yes, according to the world. But, the true believer is not to be of this world though he must live in it. Peter calls us aliens and strangers in the world (1 Peter 2:11). Jesus said of his followers, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:16).

Our status before the Lord Jesus is as his servants. We know this as Paul said, "you were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23). People that have been bought with a price are slaves. In some translations, Christians are correctly referred to as bond slaves. Bond slaves are voluntary slaves who have made a public confession of their willingness to remain the master's slave for life – exactly the requirement for Christians who are to confess their willingness to be bond slaves of the Lord Jesus for life (Romans 10:9).

What do slaves own? Slaves own nothing. They themselves are property, bought for a price, just as true Christians are bought with a price – the shed blood of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, as we voluntarily assume our role as bond servants (or bond slaves) of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 7:22), we also give up everything we have, acknowledging that everything in our possession has been entrusted to us to be used by us for the Master's use, to advance his purposes and his Kingdom.

A person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, loves him above all others, takes up his cross and follows Jesus, obeys his teachings and commands, gives up everything he has, is holy and righteous, and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Bear Fruit

Jesus said,

“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 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 (John 15:1-5).

Jesus carefully established who each of the symbols refers to. We know Jesus is the true vine. We know God, his father, is the gardener. We know we are the branches.

God the father cuts off branches in Jesus that bear no fruit! What can this mean? It doubtless means someone who professes to be a Christian because the verse says he is “in Jesus.” I believe it is also someone who started “in Jesus” with a sincere confession of faith. If it were insincere, God would have known and not considered him to be “in Jesus.” But it means this person has not matured in Jesus. Perhaps he just goes through the rote of attending church meetings, perhaps regularly, but is not producing fruit for the kingdom.

That fruit could be those who multiply themselves a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:8), as illustrated in the parable of the sower. Perhaps it could even be the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Or it could be fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8) that John the Baptist ordered the people to produce.

Jesus said the of the branches in the vine, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me (John 15:4). 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 15:6). We see that producing fruit is inextricably linked with remaining **in Jesus**. If you do not bear fruit, you will be cut off the vine (Jesus) even if you are “in Jesus” until then.

Do you think I have just gone radical, that God would never cut someone off who is “in Jesus”? Go back and read the first verses again. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. Isn't that clear? If you're not convinced, let's look at still another example.

Jesus told this 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. 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?’

“‘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).

Who are the parties to this parable? God the father is the man who had the fig tree. Jesus is the man who took care of the vineyard. You or I could be the fig tree. Remember from the text of the parable that the man (God) had the fig tree. It was in his orchard, just as in the parable of the vine, the branch was “in Jesus.” Did that allow the fig tree to grow old even if it didn’t produce fruit? No! God ordered it cut down. Only because Jesus intervened for us was the axe kept from the root of the tree. BUT, even Jesus agreed it should be cut down the next year if it didn’t bear fruit.

It is also important that the quality of the fruit be good. Jesus taught: “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A 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. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:16-20). Again we see the analogy of condemnation – being cut down and thrown into the fire – for those who do not bear good fruit.

We now know that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, loves him above all others, takes up his cross and follows Jesus, obeys his teachings and commands, gives up everything he has, is holy and righteous, bears good fruit, and is born again through the Holy Spirit.

Conformed to the Likeness of Jesus

God has many capacities that we do not – one of which is the ability to foreknow what will happen. It is called foreknowledge. Though God has not predestined anyone to salvation or damnation, as some claim, he has foreknowledge of those who will be saved. The following scripture shows that God has predestined (established in advance) criteria for those he foreknows will be saved:

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 scripture seems rarely used. Why, I wonder? I’ve never seen a discussion of it, or its clear message that God predestined that only those would be saved who were conformed to the likeness of Jesus. God predestined a qualification for a saving faith. When this scripture interpretation is considered in the full context of New Testament scriptures, it fits perfectly.

The Scriptures call us to purity, holiness, righteousness, and obedience to the Father and to the Lord Jesus. That describes Jesus exactly, whose obedience is to God his father. His obedience was perfect – he was without sin. Our obedience is to be to God, our Father, who said we are to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus.

What does this say of those who are conformed to the world instead of to the Lord Jesus? They do not have a saving faith. They do not, and will not, have salvation unless they repent, willingly submit to the Lordship of Jesus, and obey his teachings and commands with the intent of becoming like their Master.

Other scriptures corroborate the need for us to become like Jesus. Jesus said, “It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master” (Matthew 10:25). “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). The above scriptures say in different words the message of Romans 8:29, i.e., that the students (us) must be like our Teacher (Jesus).

Luke 6:40 says being conformed to the likeness of Jesus will happen to all who are fully trained. How are we to be fully trained? Didn’t Jesus tell us? His mission statement for his church (a current term for the purpose statement for organizations) is found at Matthew 28:18-20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Our responsibility – to make disciples who are conformed to the likeness of Jesus, students who are like their teacher, and servants who are like their Master – is to teach all people professing faith in the Lord Jesus to obey all the teachings and commands of Jesus.

The Apostle John confirmed the relationship between obedience and being conformed to the likeness of Jesus when he said, “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. 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).

We can conclude that a person with a saving faith repents from his sin and does not continue in sin, believes in, confesses, and receives Jesus Christ as Lord, believes Jesus is who he says he is, loves him above all others, takes up his cross and follows Jesus, obeys his teachings and commands, gives up everything he has, is holy and righteous, bears good fruit, is born again through the Holy Spirit and seeks to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

Tests Of A Saving Faith

Each of the above facets of a saving faith should be a test for us. Do we have a saving faith? Do we fulfill the conditions of a saving faith? By this time we realize that each of those facets also determines salvation. If you willfully continue in sin, don’t delude yourself by saying you are saved. You are not! Consider the people who in secret, in the privacy of their homes, watch pornography, lusting after the persons depicted on their screens. What is their spiritual condition? Jesus said to lust after a woman is the same as committing adultery in your heart. Scripture says no adulterer will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Paul said, “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). These facets of a saving faith give us the opportunity to see if we are in the faith – living in a way that will please the Lord. Masters are pleased with servants who do their best to do what is right.

They are likewise displeased with servants who willfully ignore their master's commands and act wickedly. Jesus is the Master of all true Christians. But likewise, Satan is the master of those who reject Jesus and don't obey his teachings and commands.

How differently would you live if you sought to fulfill each of Christ's commands so that you might pass the many tests in Scripture designed to show if you are in the faith? Perhaps now we can better understand why Paul exhorted the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling? (Philippians 2:12).

Salvation By Works

I am fully aware that many will claim I am proclaiming a salvation by works. "Look at all these things he's claiming we must do!" they will say. But if there is blame, let's lay the blame where it belongs.

If you're quarreling with the content of this article that seeks to delineate many of the requirements in Scripture for salvation – i.e., cannot be saved unless a certain thing is done (or not done), please remember where the requirements came from. Did I make them up? Am I just speculating about these things? No! There is no opinion of mine contained in this article, as best I know and intend. Instead you are reading what Scripture has to say – what God has said on the subject. Your quarrel is really with him.

We began this article by establishing from Scripture that salvation is **by grace and not by works** lest any man should boast. That is clear from Ephesians 2:8-9. But, let's not forget the message of verse 10: For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). If you must rail against doing "works," please remember that verse as well as Jesus' requirements for his disciples that they bear fruit (John 15:1-16), and remember that the source – the Scripture – makes works and fruit an imperative for those who are in Christ Jesus as their Lord, through a saving faith.

"Free" Gift of Salvation

I mentioned earlier that many churches today make much of the "free" gift of salvation by grace. Is that true? In the sense that the gift of salvation cannot be earned by works or cannot be bought with money, it is true. To that extent it is free.

Who can have this "free" gift of salvation? Is it available to everyone in the sense that everyone will be saved because there is the free gift of salvation? Not at all. That would be contrary to the message of Scripture. Some claim that all we have to do is accept the free gift for it to be ours. But is that true?

I suspect most people would agree that in order to avail ourselves of this "free" gift, we must believe in or have faith in Jesus. Thus the "free" gift is restricted to those who qualify. This article recites other qualifications that must be satisfied in order to receive the "free" gift. We saw that:

- We must confess Jesus as our Lord;
- We must be born again;

- We must be holy;
- We must repent;
- We must be more righteous than the Pharisees;
- We must not continue in sin;
- We must do the will of God
- We must take up our cross and follow Jesus;
- We must love Jesus more than any other person;
- We must love our brothers;
- We must give up everything we have;
- We must bear fruit; and
- We must be conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

As you can see, the “free” gift of salvation is the most expensive gift you will ever receive. In order to qualify for it, you must give up everything you have. But doesn’t that make sense? The giver gave up his life so that we could receive this gift. Should we be upset if he requires the same of us in order to receive it? The giver always has the right to put any conditions he wishes upon a gift (so long as they are legal and not prohibited by law). The Lord God only requires those conditions that will allow us to become proper citizens of his kingdom. He requires that we be like our King if we would be citizens in his kingdom.

Conclusion

The truth of another of Jesus’ teachings should be obvious now. Jesus warned, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and **only a few find it**” (Matthew 7:13-14). How many people do you know that follow Jesus as their Lord and obey his commands? How many are conformed to his likeness? Are you?

In evaluating this article about the facets of a saving faith, you are confronted with the issue of whether Scripture and the words, teachings and commands of Jesus really mean what they say. If they do (and I contend they do), each of us must come to grips with whether we are living the Christian life as God (through the Lord Jesus) said we must if we are to have salvation.

You may choose to believe that your pastor and teachers who preach another gospel are right and the teachings and commands of Jesus can be disregarded. Please remember, as you consider this, that Jesus revealed that he said and did only what God the Father told him to do and say. God gave the facets of a saving faith recited in this article.

Let’s extend the sphere beyond ourselves. How about our family, and then our church? Are we teaching those around us to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus in order to be conformed to his likeness? If not, why not? What about our church? Is it obedient to the great commission? Does it make disciples of new Christians by teaching them to obey the teachings and commands of Jesus?

I bear witness that my life was transformed by studying over and over again the Gospels to determine how to obey Jesus. Sadly, no church organized my study or taught me. I can credit only the leading of the Lord Jesus and his Holy Spirit.

America is a land filled with people who claim to be Christians but bear little or none of the fruit thereof, where professing Christians are indistinguishable in their behavior from people who don't know the Lord Jesus. Is the present post-Christian condition of America the result of our failure to obey Jesus' command to teach new disciples to obey his commands? I think so.

The Lord Jesus gave us this task. Let's get about it. Perhaps we still have time to snatch some from the fire. If we are granted enough time, we may even have a revival.

It is my experience that most professing Christians want to do the right thing, but false teaching has shown them a wrong path. It is our duty – yours and mine – to put them on the straight and narrow path to follow Jesus as their Lord and to teach them to obey all that he commanded us.
