

The Baptismal Regeneration / Believer's Baptism Debate

A theological and historical overview of the most contested
subject of the church age.

Dr. J.O. Hosler

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Chapter Ten

Attaching Personal Righteousness to the Back-side of the Gospel's Requirements

The absolute truth of the gospel needs to be identified within the boundaries of Scripture alone. Although it is helpful to read the works of others, we must stop where their reasoning goes beyond that of the sacred text. In this chapter we will not wrestle with the terms *Pelagian*, *Semi-Pelagian*, *Calvinistic*, or *Arminian*.¹ Most Christians who know enough to evoke these labels have never been substantially exposed to the writings of the men with whom the labels are identified. Instead, we will discuss the biblical paradigm of the gospel itself—what it is and what it is not.

Think of the gospel as a set of terms within a prescribed set of boundaries. Not all biblical truths are contingencies which belong inside these parameters. Though all scriptural truths are profitable (II Tim. 3:16), there are those which are more profitable, those that are less profitable, and those which are, or are not, essential to receiving the gospel. For instance, one's positions on the millennium, the rapture, or the length of days in creation do not fall within the parameters of what is essential to personal salvation. If we take a biblical concept that is important and profitably true and make it a contingency of the gospel when it is not, we have changed the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). Remember, *they of the circumcision* believed in the shed blood, death, burial and resurrection of Christ, but then added ritual and personal righteousness to the back of the equation. Paul wrote that doing this constitutes a different gospel, as he said of Peter and Barnabas: *But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel...* (Gal. 2:14a).

Placing ritual and works at the tail end of the plan of salvation still makes it a gospel of works. There are several good things which are God's will for every Christian, but they belong outside the boundaries of salvation contingencies. This subject could call for another whole book to be written, but we will cover what we consider several important errors in order that the reader can draw intelligent conclusions.

We will examine thirty-one separate polemic affirmations used to defend the contention that personal works of righteousness must be included within the parameters of the gospel's definition. Those who use these arguments are often taken literally by their thousands of readers, though they may not have thoroughly meant what they implied.

Argument #1: Total depravity means that unregenerate man is as lifeless as a literal cadaver.² This error is based on an incorrect definition of *total depravity*. The term should mean that lost man is totally without saving virtue of his own. He is spiritually bankrupt before God. In this sense he is dead in sin—separated from God. But when it is said that he is the academic equivalent of a graveyard-dead cadaver, we have a difficult time cohering that affirmation with the rest of Scripture. Man's very existence is a sovereign act of God. Lost man's capacity to see the truth, comprehend it,

¹ See R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 221 pages. Sproul compares and contrasts the views of Pelagius, Augustine, Semi-Pelagians, Luther, Calvin, Arminius, Edwards, Finney and Chafer.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), p. 64. "Because we were dead to God, we were dead to truth, righteousness, peace, happiness, and every other good thing, no more able to respond to God than a cadaver."

and desire deliverance from condemnation, is not a saving virtue. But Jesus was presenting Himself to this capacity in man when He preached, performed miracles, rose from the dead, and instituted miraculous gifts in the apostles. Fulfilled prophecy is an appeal to this capacity. Satan is fully aware of this capacity and knows that he must work to prevent lost souls from seeing the light—*In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them* (II Cor. 4:4; cf. Jn. 1:7; 12:36). Luke referred to the Bereans as *noble*, as having *received the word with readiness of mind*, and as having *searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*. Then Luke concludes: *Therefore many of them believed* (Acts 17:11, 12)

In order to be regenerated, a man must first of all be generated. This is not a cadaver state. Though lost man possesses no saving virtue, the Bible describes him as created *after the similitude of God* (Jas. 3:8, 9; cf. I Cor. 11:7). In the OT, capital punishment was not just for the murder of redeemed individuals—yet, *who sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man* (Gen. 9:6). The Bible describes lost man as having *intellect* (which tells him right from wrong), *conscience* (which tells him what he ought to do about right and wrong) and *will* (which tells him what he shall do about right and wrong). Rom. 1:18 describes lost man as holding *the truth in unrighteousness*. The knowledge of God is manifest in him, for God has shown it to him (Rom. 1:19). God created lost man to observe objectively His power and Godhead to the extent that he actually knows Him (Rom. 1:21, 22).

Paul spoke the words of truth to lost Festus and then confronted him with the fact that he knew that these things were true in that none of these words of truth were hidden from him (Acts 26:25, 26). The resurrection of Christ was a sign to an evil and adulterous generation (Matt. 12:38-40). Christ's miracles were designed to persuade the unregenerate to believe (Matt. 9:6; Jn. 4:48; 20:30, 31). Jesus advises the lost to believe His works which will lead them to know who He is and could result in their believing *that the Father is in me and I in Him* (Jn. 10:37, 38). Tongues were a sign to them that believe not (I Cor. 14:22). Fulfilled prophecy is designed to motivate belief in those who believe not (Jn. 14:29). Remember the vision of Cornelius in Acts 10 and note all the things that he experienced before regeneration. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes He will convict the world of unbelievers of sin, righteousness and of judgment (Jn. 16:8-11). In order to do this, God created unbelievers with a capacity for experiencing conviction of sin, understanding the righteousness of God and understanding the judgment of God. To attribute to unregenerate man a sovereignly God-given capacity to believe is not attributing a saving virtue to the sinner. Receiving deliverance from condemnation is a self-serving act and is not a saving virtue (Rom. 4:5; II Pet. 1:5).

This capacity in lost man was a gift of God's *common* grace, which is as sovereign as His *efficacious* grace. Therefore, we deny the charge that we are degrading the sovereign character of God by refusing to believe that lost man is a box of rocks.

Argument #2: Absolute holy obedience to all the commands of the NT is part of the definition of sovereign efficacious grace.³ Personal holiness never reaches a state of perfection in this life, yet godliness is practiced by every believer in varying

³ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 61. "But by transforming the heart, grace makes the believer wholly willing to trust and obey."

degrees. It is argued that if sovereign grace does not irresistibly cause a state of absolute obedience to the lordship of Christ, then a salvation experience has not yet occurred. Many of those making this argument deny that they are preaching salvation by personal righteousness in that God sovereignly accomplishes this through no effort on the part of the believer. It is said that the believer's will to do right is just as impotent as when he was lost and, therefore, his personal acts of righteousness are sovereign acts of God alone.

But, throughout the NT the believer is told to decide how faithful and obedient he will be. His faithfulness and obedience will never be saving virtues, but they will be rewardable virtues at the judgment seat of Christ. If faithfulness and obedience are God's

act alone, then why are there degrees of reward and inheritance in heaven? There are no degrees of salvation. Count the number of times in the NT that believers are told to put forth effort to earn rewards as Paul did when he pressed *toward the mark of the prize*. Why do Christians need to decide to be steadfast, unmovable and abounding in the work of the Lord (I Cor. 15:58)? Why do Christians have to decide to forsake not God's assembly (Heb. 10:25)? Why are the *sanctified* (10:10-14), who do forsake the assembly (10:25) by their own decision, considered worthy of punishment (10:29)? Why do saints have to decide to *sanctify the Lord God* in their hearts (I Pet. 3:15)? Why do believers have to decide to be *meet for the Master's use* (II Tim. 2:21)? Why do saints need to decide to be *faithful unto death* (Rev. 2:10)? Why do Christians have to look to themselves in order not to lose rewards that they have already earned (II Jn. 8)? Why? Because God has made it their choice to do, or not to do, His revealed will.

Argument #3: Faith and faithfulness are synonyms, so that where there is unfaithfulness, there has never been saving faith.⁴ Let us test this conclusion from an observation of Hebrews chapter eleven. Abraham left Ur *by faith*, yet he did so in disobedience, because he took his kindred with him and waited in Haran until his father died; he offered his wife to Pharaoh; and he had a son through Hagar. Were his faith and faithfulness synonymous?

By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob—but not intentionally. Isaac did not intend that the elder would serve the younger. Was his faith synonymous with his faithfulness when he lied to Abimelech about Rebekah and made a covenant with him (Gen. 26)? Was Jacob's faith synonymous with faithfulness in the way he obtained Esau's birthright and in his business dealings with his father-in-law?

By faith Moses—did Moses have to escape Egypt because of his faithfulness or because he had killed an Egyptian taskmaster and feared for his life? Was his faith also faithful as he gave God seven reasons why he should not lead Israel out of Egypt (Ex.

⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p. 16: "By separating faith from faithfulness, it leaves the impression that intellectual assent is as valid as wholehearted obedience to the truth. Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners. It is not the same message Jesus proclaimed." P. 47: "Thus the test of true faith is this: does it produce obedience? If not, it is not saving faith. Disobedience is unbelief. Real faith obeys." PP. 140, 141: "Saving faith...is an unconditional surrender, a willingness to do anything the Lord demands." P. 174: "Clearly, the biblical concept of faith is inseparable from obedience. 'Believe' is synonymous with 'obey' in John 3:36...Hebrews 11, the great treatise on faith, presents obedience and faith as inseparable."

3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13, 14; 6:12, 30)? Was it Moses' faithfulness or unfaithfulness which prohibited him from entering the promised land because he struck the rock twice in defiance of God's instructions?

It was *by faith* that Israel passed through the Red sea on dry land (Heb. 11:29); but was it their faithfulness that required them to wander in the wilderness for forty years?

Gideon had faith, but was the putting out of the fleece an act of faithfulness or doubt? Barak had faith, but was his cowardice to fight without Deborah an act of faithfulness (Judges 4:8)? Jephthah had faith, but was his misguided vow regarding his daughter an act of faithfulness and obedience? Name one thing that Samson did on purpose for God or country. He violated all of his Nazarite vows, and his dying prayer was for the strength to avenge himself of his eyes by committing suicide and taking his persecutors with him (Judges 16:28-30). He had faith, but was he faithful and perseverant?

King David had faith, but was his prayer in Ps. 51 about his faithfulness? Think about it! Heb. 11:39 tells us that these all obtained a good report *through faith* but not through perseverant faithfulness.

Argument #5: Just as efficacious grace is irresistible, so likewise is whole-hearted holiness in every dimension of life.⁵ But if this means no defect in any dimension of life, then are we not talking about sinless perfection? Yet it is argued that: *every aspect of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is an integral part of the plan of salvation.* Thus, it is said that one cannot be a believer without being a totally surrendered and obedient disciple. Obviously, this would make baptism essential to salvation.

Argument #6: Any act of obedience which comes from the believer is not of God but of the flesh.⁶ Of course, no one is ever worth saving, but after salvation the believer must walk worthy of communion with the Lord. Rewardable virtues are decisions and acts carried out by the believer in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. This is the worthiness that gauges one's reward at the judgment seat of Christ (I Cor. 11:27)—

⁵ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. xiii: "Saving faith, repentance, commitment, and obedience are all divine works, wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of everyone who is saved...real salvation cannot and will not fail to produce works of righteousness in the life of a true believer." P. 33: "Thus salvation cannot be defective in any dimension. As a part of His saving work, God will produce repentance, faith, sanctification, yieldedness, obedience, and ultimately glorification. Since He is not dependent on human effort in producing those elements, an experience that lacks any of them cannot be the saving work of God." Ibid., *Faith Works*, pp. 236, 238, [quoting Martin Luther]: "Therefore, faith is something very powerful, active, restless, effective, which at once renews a person and again regenerates him, and leads him altogether into a new manner and character of life, so that it is impossible not to do good without ceasing...Inasmuch as works naturally follow faith, as I said, it is not necessary to command them, for it is impossible for faith not to do them without being commanded, in order that we may learn to distinguish the false from the true faith."

⁶ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 30: "No one who properly interprets Scripture would ever propose that human effort or fleshly works can be *meritorious*—worthy of honor or reward from God." P. 70: "Even our good works are works of *His grace*...They are the corroborating evidence of true salvation. These works, like every other aspect of divine salvation are the product of God's sovereign grace."

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. The disciples were not worthy of salvation, but they were proud to be counted *worthy to suffer shame* for the Lord (Acts 5:41). This is why saints must walk worthy of their vocation (Eph. 4:1). Fruitful good works are pleasing to the Lord and makes the believer worthy of communion with Him (Col. 1:10). Why else must *called* saints need to walk *worthy* of fellowship with God (I Thess. 2:12)? No one is worthy to enter the kingdom of God, but there is an inheritance in the kingdom of which a saint must be worthy in order to be rewarded (II Thess. 1:5). Why is the elder, that labors in word and doctrine, to be counted *worthy of double honor* (II Tim. 5:17)? No elder is worthy of salvation, but he can be worthy of an elder's reward (I Tim. 5:18). Why are the saints in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments, worthy to walk with Christ in white? They were not worthy of salvation itself (Rev. 3:4). Peter said: *And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge* (II Pet. 1:5). Such diligence is not a saving virtue, but neither is it a work of the flesh.

Count the number of times in the NT that Christians are exhorted to make right decisions and admonished against making wrong decisions. God does not force these decisions upon them. Though He does empower them to carry out right decisions, they still often make wrong choices. Why does Paul beseech and exhort brethren to walk as they ought and to please God (I Thess. 4:1)? Why do brethren have to be exhorted to warn them that are unruly (I Thess. 5:14)? Why do some saints have to be exhorted to work and eat their own bread (II Thess. 3:12)? Why should saints have to be exhorted to pray (I Tim. 2:1)? Why is it a primary task of all preachers to exhort the saints (II Tim. 4:2)? Why must we exhort the young to be sober-minded (Titus 2:6)? Why are saints to exhort one another daily (Heb. 3:13)? Why do elders need to be exhorted to feed the flock and not to act as lords over God's heritage (I Pet. 5:1-4)? Why must saints be exhorted to contend for the faith (Jude 3)? Why? Because these are decisions that saints must make. They will be rewarded in this life and in the life to come for right decisions and chastised for wrong decisions.

Argument #6: Logically, disobedience on the part of a believer would be a failure of God's sovereign grace—which cannot fail.⁷ This would be true only if God's sovereign grace is a guarantee against human failure—which it is not. God's grace is unmerited favor. Sin in the life of a believer is not a failure of God's grace. Otherwise, God's grace has failed in the life of every believer in that each one needs to confess sin daily (I Jn. 1:9). Note the distinction between God's sovereign desire for Jerusalem and His sovereign permissive will for the same—*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would*

⁷ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 260: "*Irresistible grace*: grace that transforms the heart and thus makes the believer wholly willing to trust and obey. Saving grace is always irresistible." PP. 61, 62: "It is clear from all this that the sovereignty of God in salvation is at the heart of the lordship debate...But by transforming the heart, grace makes the believer wholly willing to trust and obey...Scripture makes clear that every aspect of grace is God's sovereign work...In no stage of the process is grace thwarted by human effort...If God's purposes were dependent on some self-generated response of faith or on human merit, then God Himself would not be sovereign and salvation would not be wholly His work." Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 33: "But true salvation wrought by God will not fail to produce the good works that are its fruit."

I [God's sovereign desire] have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! [God allows them to resist His sovereign desire] (Matt. 23:37; cf. Lk. 13:34).

Including personal righteousness in the definition of irresistible grace would equally make heresy an impossibility on the part of the believer. Then why do so many of the authors of the *lordship salvation* view go to great length to quote historical figures who never held a scriptural view of baptism? Why would God not have irresistibly caused

Jerome, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and the Puritans to understand the nature of true baptism, the distinction between church and state, church and Israel, or circumcision and baptism? Why? Because doctrinal orthodoxy in all important areas is not a part of the definition of saving grace. When you take something which is good and important and make it a contingency of salvation, when it is not, you alter the gospel itself, and it becomes another gospel.

Argument #7: Irresistible grace means that the believer no longer has his old nature with which to contend. Regeneration is a wholesale transformation of the whole person in every dimension.⁸ But why, then, does Paul beseech the brethren of Rome to not be conformed to this world, but rather to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:1, 2)? In Rom. 6:6 the *old man* is nailed to the cross. Does this mean that he no longer exists and therefore the saint does not have to *put off the old man* daily (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9)? These passages are not speaking of eradication. The *new man* is also crucified with Christ, but he is definitely not graveyard dead (Gal. 2:20). The Bible speaks of the believer crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24, 25), yet the flesh is alive and wicked and must be mortified daily (Rom. 6:11-14, 19; 8:13). The crucifixion of the flesh does not eradicate the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16, 17).

Argument #8 An elect person cannot fail to distinguish himself from the lost world.⁹ Why then does Paul beseech them to not be conformed to this world (Rom.

⁸ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 116: "Nor is Paul describing a dualistic, schizophrenic Christian. The old man—the unregenerate person that was 'in Adam'—is dead...If the old self *isn't* dead, conversion hasn't occurred." P. 37, [quoting J. Gresham Machen]: "Faith...involves a change of the whole nature of man...The very first thing that the Christian does, therefore, is to keep the law of God...he keeps it joyously as a central part of salvation itself." P.45: "Saving faith, then, is the whole of my being embracing all of Christ. Faith cannot be divorced from commitment."

⁹ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 124: "*The Worldly Heart*: Weedy soil represents a heart preoccupied with worldly matters...This is a perfect description of a worldly man—one who lives for the things of this world. He is consumed with the cares of this age. His chief pursuit is a career, a house, a car, a hobby, or a wardrobe. To him, prestige, looks, or riches are everything...Has such a person lost his salvation? No, he never had it." P. 140 "Thus in a sense we pay the ultimate price for our salvation when our sinful self is nailed to the cross...It is a total abandonment of self-will,...It is an exchange of all that we are for all that Christ is, and it denotes implicit obedience, full surrender to the lordship of Christ. Nothing less can qualify as saving faith. Geerhardus Vos articulates this principle when he writes, 'Jesus requires of his disciples the renunciation of all earthly bonds and possessions which would dispute God his supreme sway over their life...'" P. 187: "God will not declare a person righteous without making him righteous...One cannot pick and choose, accepting eternal life while rejecting holiness and obedience." P. 202: "A true believer is one who signs up for life...It means taking up the cross daily, giving all for Christ each day with no reservations, no uncertainty, no hesitation. It means nothing is knowingly held back, nothing purposely shielded from His lordship, nothing stubbornly kept from His control. It calls for a

12:2)? Why did Paul say that the Corinthians were walking *as men* (I Cor. 3:3)? Why does Paul admit that married men and women in the church care for the things of this world (I Cor. 7:33, 34)? Why does Paul warn the Colossians to beware of being *spoiled after the rudiments of the world* (Col. 2:8)? Why does Paul ask the Colossians why, if they are *dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world*, are they *subject to ordinances* as though they were *living in the world* (Col. 2:20)? Why does James tell believers that *friendship of the world is enmity with God* (James 4:4)? Why? Because there are such persons as worldly Christians.

Argument #9: Election means that a believer cannot resist practicing perfect love at all times.¹⁰ Included in the definition of love is keeping all the commandments of

Christ, keeping the word of God, loving all brothers at all times, and walking in the light at all times. How then could the reformers, Roman Catholics and Puritans have hated the Anabaptists so vehemently? Why, then, was it necessary to tell the Romans to *let love be without dissimulation* (Rom. 12:9)? Why did the Corinthians have to be beseeched to confirm their love to a repenting brother (II Cor. 2:8)? Why did the Galatians have to be told to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13)? Why did Paul have to pray for the Ephesians to be rooted and grounded in love (Eph. 3:17)? Why did Paul have to beseech the Ephesians to forbear one another in love (Eph. 4:1, 2)? Why did Paul have to tell Christian men to love their wives (Eph. 5:25)? And how could the Ephesian church, founded by Paul, have left its first love (Rev. 2:4)? Why did Paul need to tell the Thessalonians to put on the breastplate of love (I Thess. 5:8)? Why did he have to tell Timothy to follow after love (I Tim. 6:11; II Tim. 1:13)? Why do young Christian wives need to be taught to love their husbands (Titus 2:4)? Why do Christians need to provoke one another unto love (Heb. 10:24)? Why must Christians be told to let brotherly love continue (Heb. 13:1)? Why must Peter tell the saints to love one another as brethren (I Pet. 3:8)? Why does he tell Christians to be diligent to add charity and brotherly kindness to their faith (II Pet. 1:5-7)? Why must John tell the saints not to love the world (I Jn. 2:15)? Why was it necessary for him to tell the saints that they ought to love one another

(I Jn. 4:11)? Why did Jude have to tell the beloved to keep themselves in the love of God (Jude 21)? Why? Because many saved believers can and do lack love, and thereby forfeit their fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. I Jn. 4:10, 11 says: *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* Love is an important and profitable attribute of a Christian, but it is God's love and not our own that saves us and keeps us saved.

Argument #10: An elect person irresistibly cannot have a sinful habit.¹¹ Some will hold that there cannot exist a born again alcoholic nor a born again nicotine

painful severing of the tie with the world...Having put his hand to the plow, he will not look back." Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 115: "Paul's stress is not on the *immorality* of continuing to live the way we did before we were saved, but on the *impossibility* of it."

¹⁰ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 188: "There is no such thing as a Christian who lacks this love....No-lordship theology ignores this vital truth....Jesus said, 'if you love Me, you will keep my commandments.' 'He who has my commandments and keeps them, he is who loves me' (Jn. 4:21). Conversely, 'He who does not love Me does not keep My words' (v. 24)."

addict. Then why did Samson practice vindictiveness all the way through the moment of his death? Virtually every one of his supernatural demonstrations were acts of personal retribution. All he wanted from his final suicide was reprisal for his eyes. Why did some Corinthians persist in sin until God put them to death (I Cor. 11:30)? Does salvation mean that the flesh is incapable of addiction and that there can be no such an one as a regenerated over-eater—or that at least a saint will not die over-eating? Why do Christians have to *let not sin reign* in their mortal bodies (Rom. 6:12)? Why must they be told to *mortify the deeds of the body* (Rom. 8:13)? Why must they be told to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh (II Cor. 7:1)? Why must they be told to not use their liberty as an occasion to the flesh (Gal. 5:13)? Why must they be told to walk in the Spirit in order not to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, if true saints cannot fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16)? Why do Christians need to know that they reap corruption when they sew to the flesh (Gal. 6:7, 8)? Why must they be told not to live the rest of their time in the flesh to the lusts of men, if it is impossible for a Christian to do this for the rest of his time (I Pet. 4:2)? Why must Peter beseech the saints to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul (I Pet. 2:11)? Why? Because Christians can have sinful problems that persist until their sin brings about the judgment of God in their death.

Argument #11: If one does not make obedience to the commands of Christ a contingency of salvation, he is therefore an antinomian in a state of apostasy and is consequently leading souls to an eternal hell.¹² Every Christian should pay the price of being an obedient disciple of the Lord. However, the blood of Christ is the 100 percent full price of salvation (Acts 20:28). When we offer our own obedience to the commands of Christ as our basis for assurance of heaven, we are missing the true meaning of the gospel message. If the believer is irresistibly like a glove on the hand of Jesus as Lord, then there is no need for temperance or self-control. A glove does not need self-control. Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not speak of a *spirit-controlled* life. The will of the Spirit is that we practice self-control and, to the extent that we decide to do so, He will reward us. This is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) rather than the control of the Spirit.

Argument #12: The believer irresistibly cannot fail to mortify the flesh.¹³ But

¹¹ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 121: “No true believer will continue indefinitely in disobedience...Real Christians cannot endure perpetually sinful living.” P. 114: “So it is impossible to be alive in Christ and still be alive to sin.”

¹² Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. xiv: “Several who disagree with my views have said in print that the lordship controversy is a matter of eternal consequence. This means that whoever is wrong on this question is proclaiming a message that can send people to hell. On that we agree. I went through a phase of thinking that the whole dispute might be a misunderstanding or a matter of semantics. But as I studied the issues, I discovered that this is simply not the case...I am now convinced that the two sides of this argument have distinctly different views of salvation.” Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 30: “The lordship controversy is a disagreement over the nature of true faith.” P. 94: “Contemporary no-lordship doctrine is nothing but latter-day antinomianism.... Although most no-lordship advocates object to that term, it is a fair characterization of their doctrine.” P. 233: “Dispensationalism is at a crossroads. The lordship controversy represents a signpost where the road forks. One arrow marks the road of biblical orthodoxy. The other arrow, labeled ‘no-lordship’ points the way to sub-Christian antinomianism.”

¹³ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 134: “‘In The Flesh’ is descriptive of an unregenerate condition.” PP. 190, 191: “Inevitably, the question is raised, ‘how faithfully must one persevere....Ryrie suggests that if we cannot state precisely how much failure is possible for a Christian, true assurance becomes impossible. He wants the terms to be quantified....Jesus never quantified the terms of His demands; He always made

we think of the example of justified Lot in Sodom (II Pet. 2:7, 8). If a contemporary saint offered his two virgin daughters to a band of homosexuals, became drunk, and later impregnated both daughters, he would be judged to have failed to mortify his flesh.¹⁴ Why must Christians be reminded to mortify their bodies in order to live (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5)? Why must Christians be beseeched to present their bodies to Christ for service (Rom. 12:1, 2)? Why must Christians be told not to make provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14)? Why must they be told not to lust after evil things and to not be idolaters (I Cor. 10:6, 7)? Why must they be instructed on how not to fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16)? Why must they be told not to live in the lust of concupiscence as the Gentiles do (I Thess. 4:3-5)? Why was it necessary to tell Timothy to flee youthful lusts (II Tim. 2:22)? Why must Peter beseech the beloved to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul (I Pet. 2:11)? Why? Because believers can fail to mortify the flesh.

Argument #13: Absolute obedience is either integral to the definition of faith or else an unmistakable by-product of it.¹⁵ We do know that ritual baptism is the will of God for believers and that it is an act of faithfulness and obedience to the lordship of Christ. We know from Mk. 16:16 that *belief* and *baptism* are two separate occurrences. Are we therefore to understand that ritual baptism is a guaranteed by-product of faith? Does the sovereign grace of God take full responsibility for the believer's faithfulness and obedience to baptism, thus making failure to follow the Lord in baptism an impossibility? The answer to these questions is a resounding—*NO!*

Argument #14: Those who fail to back-load the gospel with personal righteousness are failing to instruct would-be converts to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age.¹⁶ This is a less than honest accusation, for though there is usually no failure to teach these things, they are not placed within the parameters of the gospel's definition. It is never a valid argument to use intimidating and pejorative language when referring to those who refuse to add personal righteousness to the gospel equation. Calling them *no-lordship* preachers states that they are actually opposed to any submission to the lordship of Christ. These accusers would not like to be called the *no-grace* crowd. Those who preach *free grace* are often accused of preaching *cheap grace*. This little quip of

them *absolute*. 'So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions' (Lk. 14:33); 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of me' (Matt. 10:37); 'He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal' (John 12:25)." Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 106: "...nor will He enter into partnership with one who loves to fulfill the passions of the flesh."

¹⁴ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 128: "Lot was certainly not 'carnal' in the sense that he lacked spiritual desires. Though he lived in a wicked place, he was not wicked himself."

¹⁵ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 173: "In other words, faith encompasses obedience... Yet faith is not complete unless it is obedient." P. 174: "Clearly, the biblical concept of faith is inseparable from obedience. 'Believe' is synonymous with 'obey' in John 3:36..."

¹⁶ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 56: "No-lordship theology utterly ignores the biblical truth that grace 'instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age' (Titus 2:12)." P. 228: "Chafer himself... paved the way for a brand of Christianity that has legitimized careless and carnal behavior. Chafer could rightly be called the father of twentieth-century no-lordship theology. He listed repentance and surrender as two of 'the more common features of human responsibility which are too often erroneously added to the one requirement of *faith* or *belief*.' He wrote 'to impose a need to surrender the life to God as an added condition of salvation is most unreasonable. God's call to the unsaved is never said to be unto the Lordship of Christ; it is unto His saving grace.'"

mockery is designed to portray them as cheapening the crucifixion of Christ if they fail to add personal righteousness to the righteousness of Christ. We are supposed to cower when accused of preaching *easy believism*. But the Bible does not coin a phrase like *easy believism* or *hard believism*. However, if obeying the lordship of Christ is not a part of the definition of saving faith, then this makes believing much easier. On the other hand, if absolute submission and obedience are an irresistible act of a sovereign God which requires no effort on the part of the believer, then nothing could be easier. However, believers are constantly warned that such a commitment will be costly and hard to carry out in the Christian life.

Argument #15: *Free-grace* preachers are teaching that the work of God in the believer's life stops at the moment of justification and that everything else is nothing but the believer's own effort apart from God's empowering.¹⁷ We would like to have in our possession just a few of the names of these "many" who hold that justification is the only work of God in the believer's life. With very rare exception, almost all *free grace* preachers live godly lives and exhort all saints to do the same for the glory of Christ.

Argument 16: Some will refine their polemic by allowing temporary lapses and yet qualify themselves by affirming that any more than a temporary lapse would mean that salvation had never occurred in the first place.¹⁸ But this assumes that no believer can die in one of these states of failure without first repenting. If this is correct, what do we do with Samson and some of the Corinthians (I Cor. 11:30)? Do we honestly believe that a Christian cannot die in a state of disobedience? If he dies in that condition, it was permanent in regard to his earthly life. As we surveyed in chapter three of this present work, the nature of salvation faith transcends all dispensations. This is why Abraham is the father of all them that believe. But Samson was carnal all of his life. He gambled for garments, yoked himself with heathen women, ate from a dead carcass, allowed his hair to be cut and committed suicide to gain personal vengeance for his eyes. Yet he is listed in Hebrews 11 as having lived by faith. Of course he was wrong and paid dearly for his unfaithfulness, but is the nature of his salvation faith that which transcends all dispensations?—Yes! How many OT saints lived their entire lives with multiple wives and concubines? Can it be said that none of these were saved in the first place?

The Davidic Covenant illustrates the difference between the security of a believer and God's chastisement of a believer when referring to David's son, Solomon—*He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart*

¹⁷ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus* [Revised Edition], pp. 201, 202: "Those who argue against lordship salvation often base their theology on the faulty assumption that the work of God in salvation stops with justification. The rest, many believe, is purely the believer's own effort..."

¹⁸ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 121: "No true believer will continue indefinitely in disobedience, because sin is diametrically opposed to our new and holy nature. Real Christians cannot endure perpetually sinful living." P. 181, quoting John Murray: "It is true that a believer sins; he may fall into grievous sin and backslide for lengthy periods. But it is also true that a believer cannot abandon himself to sin; he cannot come under the dominion of sin; he cannot be guilty of certain kinds of unfaithfulness." P. 182: "God's own holiness thus requires that we persevere.... We cannot acquire 'the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus' unless we 'press on toward the goal' (Phil. 3:14)." **Which is it? Are we regenerated before we actually believe or is salvation a goal we must press toward throughout life?**

away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee (II Sam. 7:13-15; cf. Ezek. 16).

Argument #17: An inventory of personal righteousness will determine if one is called and elected.¹⁹ The Apostle Peter said: *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall* (II Pet. 1:10). It is commonly argued that the apostle is telling believers to look at their own righteousness for the assurance of salvation. But we must examine the context to see if the call to salvation and the election of grace is being addressed in this verse.

Peter is addressing people that are born again—

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (II Pet. 1:1).

Peter is speaking to those of *like precious faith* (vss. 5-8), who possess the imputed righteousness of Christ, telling them to add to their faith: *virtue* [knowing that faith is not a saving virtue], *knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity*. But what of the believer who lacks these things?—*But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins* (II Pet. 1:9). Has such a person of like precious faith been purged from his old sins?—Yes! Peter is not talking about whether these brethren even go to heaven, but rather the degree in which a brother will abundantly enter into the kingdom of God—

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (vss. 10, 11).

Then what is this *calling* of which we are to make sure? God has called all of the elect saints on earth to a *vocation* of practicing sonship which will involve humility; forbearance; unity; baptism; truth-speaking; love; putting off the old man; being renewed in the spirit of their minds; putting on the new man; putting away lying; cessation from stealing; avoidance of corrupt communication; edifying the brethren; grieving not the Holy Spirit; putting away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking and malice; and being kind, tenderhearted and forgiving toward one another (Eph. 4:1ff). This is another calling in addition to the call to salvation, for some Christians are blind and do not obey this additional calling (II Pet. 1:9).

The ideas of *calling* and *election* do not always refer to salvation. When God calls or elects, it is a choice that He makes. Paul was *called* to be an apostle (Rom. 1:1; I

¹⁹ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 217, 218: “Yet he [Peter] taught that the proof of faith’s reality is the virtue it produces in the life of the believer (2 Peter 1:5-9). He wrote, “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you.” Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 162: “Should Christians seek assurance through clinging only to the *objective* promises of Scripture, or through *subjective* self-examination? If we opt for the objective promises only, those who profess faith in Christ while denying Him by their deeds (cf. Titus 1:16) can claim an assurance they have no entitlement to.” P. 164: “Second Peter 1:5-10 lists several spiritual virtues that are essential to salvation: faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. The person who lacks these virtues will also lack assurance...”

Cor. 1:1). God has *called* husbands and wives to live in peace (I Cor. 7:15). Obeying the commandments of God in your individual circumstances is a specific *calling* (I Cor. 7:19-24). Brethren have been *called* to practice Christian liberty (Gal. 5:13). Christians are *called* to let the peace of God rule in their hearts (Col. 3:15). Believers are *called* unto holiness (I Thess. 4:7). Saints are *called* to fight the good fight of faith (II Tim. 6:11, 12). Believers are *called* to suffer for evil and railing (I Pet. 3:9). They are *called* to suffer for doing well (I Pet. 2:20, 21). Paul was not pressing to be saved or to be sure that he was saved, but he was pressing for the prize of the *high calling* (Phil. 3:14). Peter is telling his readers that a personal inventory will make them sure of whether or not they are obeying these callings. In II Peter 1:3, the calling under discussion is to virtue and glory.

In the same sense, God has not only elected us to His grace, but He has also elected us unto this vocation of sonship. A synonym for *elected* is the concept of *chosen* (Eph. 1:4; II Thess. 2:13). God has *elected* many things for the believer—and his salvation is only one of them. God *elected* that the Gentiles would hear the gospel through Peter (Acts 15:7). Paul was *elected* to bear the name of Christ before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:14). The apostles were specially *elected* witnesses (Acts 10:41). God has *elected* foolish things to confound the wise; weak things to confound the mighty and base things and things that are nought to bring to nought the things that are (I Cor. 1:27, 28). Christians are *elected* to be soldiers (II Tim. 2:4). God has *elected* the poor in this world to be rich in faith (Jas. 2:5). God has *elected* those who are called out of darkness to show forth the praises of Him (I Pet. 2:9).

Therefore, it is not one's calling and election to salvation that is made sure by self-examination regarding the items listed in II Pet. 1:5-7. Peter did not doubt the salvation of one who lacked these things (vs. 9). He did not regard the calling and election of such an one to salvation as unsure. Peter's readers have saving faith (vss. 1, 5); they have been given *all things that pertain to life and godliness* (vs. 3); and these things were received *through the knowledge of him who has called* them (vs. 3). The knowledge of God and of Christ is in fact the very sphere where *grace and peace* will be *multiplied* to them (vs. 2). Peter's final word to his readers is an exhortation to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (3:18). Peter takes for granted that his audience is not only Christian, but is perfectly aware of that fact. Was Peter certain that he was talking to brethren?—

Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (I Pet. 2:11, 12).

Argument 18: That salvation repentance is a total turning from sin in order to accept the grace of the Savior.²⁰ We could labor with all of the biblical usages of the term *repentance*, but the reader may have already done this.²¹ Repentance [NT *Metanoein*] is a changing of the mind. The term, according to its contextual use, may, or

²⁰ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 32: "Repentance...Far from being a human work, it is the inevitable result of God's work in a human heart...It is much more than a mere change of mind—it involves a complete change of heart, attitude, interest, and direction. It is a conversion in every sense of the word."

may not entail works of personal righteousness. If we wish to define it as a work of righteousness, then works are to be added to faith. But if it is a change of mind about the crucifixion of Christ for our sins and His provision of justification, forgiveness, reconciliation, and sanctification, then it is not works added to faith. If the book of Acts seems to use the terms *faith*, *belief*, and *repentance* interchangeably (as we have already discussed in previous chapters), then we do not have works of personal righteousness being added to faith. If one did not believe in Christ five minutes ago but does so now, he has changed his mind. Salvation repentance is not turning from sin to Christ, but rather a turning to Christ with one's sins. If someone believes in a false gospel, he cannot add Christ to his idol, but must turn his faith from a gospel which cannot save to Him Who can. It is not what one does with his sins, but rather what Christ does with his sins, that saves him.

When a born again Christian falls into sin, he is expected to work at turning from that sin. But this is not a form of works that belongs within the prescribed boundaries of the gospel definition.

A lost person can change his mind about sin and reform from some forms of wickedness, but he will be neither saved nor eternally rewarded for this. He may, however, reap some earthly benefits from living a prudent life.

We do know from Scripture that assurance of salvation is possible, and we also know that no one completely ceases from sin. This brings us to the question of quantification. If salvation repentance entails the work of ceasing from all sin, when does one know that he has ceased enough to be certain of his salvation? The Bible presents absolutely no quantification standards. What sin would assure us that we were never saved in the first place—the first cigarette; the first pack; the first carton; the first crate, or, what if one never quits smoking? When do we quit sinning enough to know that we are saved? No one would know, and assurance of salvation would be impossible.

Even after we have practiced godliness for extended periods of our lives, what is our guarantee that we will not fall into sin again and suspect that we were never saved in the first place? If we have no such guarantee, then we have no logical basis for assurance even after years of consistent godliness. From such a perspective, the biblical promises that the believer in Christ has eternal life are stripped of their assurance (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 10:43; 16:31; I Jn. 5:13). So, that which would seem to be a “wholehearted willingness” to obey all of Christ's commands would be no grounds for assurance in that many Christians are admonished for not following through with such a commitment. Paul thought it necessary to exhort the Corinthians to perform what they expressed a willingness to do the prior year (II Cor. 8:10, 11).

²¹ There are three influential books on the market that definitively address the subject of repentance. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1989). MacArthur identifies *repentance* as personal righteousness yet identifies it solely as an act of God. Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free* (Grand Rapids, Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1989). Hodges excludes *repentance* from the definition of the saving Gospel of Christ. Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation: What It Means To Believe In Jesus Christ* (USA, Victor Books, a Division of Scripture Press Publications Inc., 1989). Ryrie holds that *belief*, *faith* and *repentance* are synonyms in the gospel and do not entail personal works of righteousness in order to lay hold of eternal salvation. It is strongly recommended that the reader obtain and study all three of these books.

Therefore, we conclude that the assurance of salvation is not based upon following through with a promise that one will turn permanently from all sin—a promise that no human being has ever kept. Assurance of salvation is to be based solely upon the unconditional promises of God in the finished work of Christ.

Argument #19: If one is truly born again, he will always walk in the light and never in darkness.²² Except when referring to literal daylight or lamplight, Scripture usually uses the term *light* as a metaphor for truth. The gospel is light, the entire Bible is light, and the teachings of Christ and the apostles are light. The truth of God's word is the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit does not irresistibly cause a unified consensus on doctrine within the Body of Christ.

If being born again guarantees walking in the light, and thus walking in the truth at all times, then some very important questions need to be asked. Was Paul assuming that Peter and Barnabas were lost when he said: *but when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel...* (Gal. 2:14a)? Was Paul saying that the entirety of the Galatian churches were unregenerate when he said: *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel* (Gal. 1:6). Why is it that the one who hates his Christian brother in Christ (I Jn. 2:9) is lying if he says that he is in the light but is instead walking in darkness and is, therefore, walking in blindness (I Jn. 2:11)? Why would Peter state that one who is thus blinded has nonetheless been purged from his old sins (II Pet. 1:9)?

Argument #20: The great names of Church history believed in back-loading the Gospel with works.²³ We have cited many authors in this work who have taken a different view of grace than the position we are setting forth. However, in defense of these historic figures, it may be said that there were windows of time in the thinking of several of them in which they understood, and seemingly embraced, the pure grace of Christ solely by faith in His finished work. Let us consider Martin Luther as one example. When the sophists and scholastics argued that the believer's love was a point in the plan of salvation, it was incumbent upon Luther to stress the importance of Christian love without making it a contingency of the gospel. In his lectures on the first four chapters of Galatians, he responded to the scholastics:

They say that we must believe in Christ and that faith is the foundation of salvation, but they say that this faith does not justify unless it is "formed by love." This is not the truth of the Gospel; it is falsehood and pretence. The true Gospel, however, is this: Works or love are not

²² Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 167: Throughout Scripture, light is used as a metaphor for truth—both intellectual and moral truth....To 'walk in the light' means to live in the realm of truth. So all true believers are walking in the light—even when we sin....To trust Jesus Christ is to walk in the light. To walk in the light is to heed the light and live accordingly."

²³ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 225: "Virtually all credal statements coming out of the Reformation identified good works as the inevitable expression of saving faith." PP. 223, 224: "The incident that symbolically marked the beginning of the Reformation was Martin Luther's posting of his *Ninety-five Theses* on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church in 1517. The first four theses show clearly what Luther thought of the necessity of good works: 1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, 'Repent ye, etc.,' meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance. 2. This saying cannot be understood of the sacrament of penance (i.e. of confession and absolution) which is administered by the priesthood. 3. Yet he does not mean interior repentance only; nay, interior repentance is void if it does not produce different kinds of mortifications of the flesh. 4. And so penance remains while self-hate remains (i.e. true interior repentance): namely right up to entrance into the kingdom of heaven."

the ornament or perfection of faith; but faith itself is a gift of God, a work of God in our hearts, which justifies us because it takes hold of Christ as the Savior...Therefore what the scholastics have taught about justifying faith "formed by love" is an empty dream. For the faith that takes hold of Christ, the Son of God and is adorned by Him is the faith that justifies, not a faith that includes love. For if faith is to be sure and firm, it must take hold of nothing but Christ alone.²⁴

Luther makes almost the same response to the sophists by not doing away with love and law, but rather placing them outside the boundaries of the saving gospel:

...faith in Christ, without the Law or works. The blind sophists do not understand this. Therefore they dream that faith does not justify unless it does the works of love. In this way faith that believes in Christ becomes idle and useless, for it is deprived of the power to justify unless it has been "formed by love." But you set the Law and love aside until another place and time; and you direct your attention to the point at issue here, namely, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dies on the cross and bears my sin, the Law, death, the devil, and hell in His body.²⁵

Luther came to the place where he found it necessary to be explicit in his view that works cannot be included in the definition of true faith:

Then What? Is the Law useless for righteousness? Yes, certainly, but does faith alone without works, justify? Yes, certainly. Otherwise you must repudiate Moses, who declares that Abraham is righteous prior to the Law and prior to the works of the Law, not because he sacrificed his son, who had not yet been born, and not because he did this or that work, but because he believed God who gave him a promise.

In this passage no mention is made of any preparation for grace, of any faith formed by works, or of any preceding disposition. This, however, is mentioned: that at that time Abraham was in the midst of sins, doubts, and fears, and was exceedingly troubled in spirit.

How, then did he obtain righteousness? In this way: God speaks and Abraham believes what God is saying. Moreover, the Holy Spirit comes as a trustworthy witness and declares that this very believing or this very faith is righteousness or is imputed by God Himself as righteousness and is regarded by Him as such.²⁶

Argument # 21: The gospel is to be back-loaded with works because of the fact that *faith* is called a *work* in Jn. 6:28, 29—²⁷

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

²⁴ *Luther's Works: Lectures on Galatians Chapters 1-4*, Jaroslav Pelikan, Ed., Walter A Hansen, Associate Ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), Vol. 26, pp. 88, 89.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 26, p. 160.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20*, Jaroslav Pelikan, Ed., (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), Vol. 3, pp. 20, 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 33: "There is a sense in which Jesus calls even the act of believing a work (John 6:29)..."

This is a totally unique application to the term *work*. In this case it cannot mean obedience

to the Mosaic Law, pre-Mosaic Law, nor a list of all the commandments of the Great Commission. We can only conclude that the word *work* means that faith is an act on the part of the sinner as a requirement for receiving eternal life. However, it cannot be an act which has saving virtue (Rom. 4:5), though it is a step required of the sinner in order to become born again. Charles Bing explains it coherently with Scripture when he writes:

Both MacArthur and Mueller use this dialogue between Jesus and some followers to argue that faith is a work. Jesus' answer to those who ask, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" is "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." Believing is not here called a work that *God* produces, for the question from the followers is "what shall we do"...Rather, "the work of God" refers to that which God requires of men. This work, however, is not something done as a human merit or a work of the law, which was what the questioners expected to hear as signified by their use of the plural "works." It is only the act of believing that God requires, as indicated by Jesus' answer using the singular "work" (cf. I Jn. 3:23).²⁸

They could not be reconciled to God by acts of personal saving virtue. There was only one requirement, or work, that God demands for salvation—to believe.

In the same sense, Paul speaks of the *law of faith* (Rom. 3:27, 28). This is also a unique use of the term *law*. Faith is a law only in the sense that God requires sinners to change their minds about receiving what Christ has completed for them on the cross—which is the meaning of *repent* or *believe* (Acts 17:30). Obedience to this law does not remotely imply obedience to any other law in the Bible.

Argument #22: To be a Christian and to be a disciple are exactly the same thing.²⁹ This means that all of the terms of discipleship in the NT are also the terms of salvation—

If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple (Lk. 14:26, 27).

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (vs. 33).

It is said that responding to the discipleship call is to become a Christian and that anything less is simply unbelief. Those who hold this view of the gospel remind us that

²⁸ Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* [Th.D. Dissertation: Dallas Theological Seminary], (Burlison, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 1992). This work is definitive reading for those interested in the *lordship salvation* debate. The dissertation can be ordered from GraceLife Ministries, 524 Jayellen Ave., Burlleston, TX 76028.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 196: "The contemporary teaching that separates discipleship from salvation springs from ideas that are foreign to Scripture....Every Christian is a disciple. The Lord's Great Commission was to go into all the world and 'make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you'....Disciples are people who believe, those whose faith motivates them to obey all Jesus commanded. The word *disciple* is used consistently as a synonym for believer throughout the book of Acts....Any distinction between the two words is purely artificial."

the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) was to go into all the world and make disciples. But the process of discipleship in this commission required ritual baptism plus learning to observe every command of Jesus Christ. If the writings of the apostles (which are also the commandments of the Lord) are coupled with all the commandments of Christ, we have a total of one hundred and twenty-seven contingencies in the plan of salvation. If this analogy is correct, then salvation is indeed by works of personal righteousness. But if sovereign grace irresistibly causes such obedience apart from any personal effort on the part of the believer, then there would not be such disparities in the degrees of obedience among contemporary Christians nor of saints in the Bible. In such a case, there would be no need for a Judgment Seat of Christ in that God's sovereignty would be accountable to have made all Christians equally obedient.

Argument #23: People will not serve God or contribute to the church if they think that personal righteousness is not necessary to salvation. We must stop at this point to say that we are not judging the motives of anyone who back-loads the Gospel with works in the way we have discussed. However, it is easy to meet some who will openly confess their motives. Being overwhelmed by apathetic church members, they find it almost impossible to recruit volunteer workers and staff while at the same time watching the financial contributions moving steadily downward. It is soon discovered that these members will be mobilized by being told that their refusal to serve and give proves that they were never saved in the first place. It is reasoned that if the fear of hell was their best reason to accept Christ, then it will be their best reason to serve Christ as well. The motive in this case is to persuade Christians to obey Christ, which is a noble motive. However, no matter how desperate we are to see Christians come to such a state of commitment to the lordship of Christ, we should never be willing to preach a gospel of works to get them there.

Argument #24: If anyone consciously holds on to any particular sin at conversion, he cannot become born again.³⁰ This is a return to the question of quantification. Without demanding total compliance to Christ's lordship, it is insisted that if there is a conscious intention to refrain from giving up any particular sin, salvation cannot occur. But the truth is that every time a Christian sins, he is consciously doing so, and is committing an act of rebellion. This is never an act of willingness to obey Christ. Was the Apostle Peter really saved when he said: *not so, Lord* (Acts 10:14), if a truly born again person, by God's sovereign will, cannot say such a thing?

Argument #25: Contradictions are not really contradictory if they exist within our definition of the Gospel.³¹ Books which mandate the back-loading of the

³⁰ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 202: "The idea of daily self-denial does not jibe with the contemporary supposition that believing in Jesus is a momentary decision. A true believer is one who signs up for life....It means nothing is knowingly held back, nothing purposely shielded from His lordship, nothing stubbornly kept from His control."

³¹ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 31: "Misunderstanding on that key point is at the heart of the error of those who reject lordship salvation. They assume that because Scripture contrasts faith and works, faith may be devoid of works....They stumble over the twin truths that salvation is a gift, yet it costs everything." P. 140: "Eternal life is indeed a free gift (Rom. 6:23). Salvation cannot be earned with good deeds or purchased with money. It has already been bought by Christ, who paid the ransom with His blood. But that does not mean there is no cost in terms of salvation's impact on the sinner's life. This paradox may be difficult but it is nevertheless true: salvation is both free and costly....Thus in a sense we

gospel with works of personal righteousness allow contradictions when they insist that salvation is a free gift, yet it costs the believer everything. They say that Jesus paid it all but that the believer pays the ultimate price. These authors say that unless there is a total abandonment of self-will, saving faith is not happening.

In the field of applied logic we call this a contradictory. A syllogism cannot have a combination of *all are* and *some are not*, or a combination of *no are* and *some are*. Not even in a mystical dimension can there be a square circle, a four-sided triangle, or a three-sided square. Theological liberals have long accused Bible believers of excusing alleged contradictions by affirming that an inerrant Bible can have many contradictions but from the perspective of God these are not contradictions after all. But the Bible was inspired to communicate to humans designed by God to think in a linear logical fashion (cf. Rom. 1:18-20). Eternal salvation cannot be without price to the sinner and at the same time personally cost him everything. In college, if a student contradicts himself completely, he will not impress his professor by labeling the contradiction a *further qualification* of his

first position. Sound scholarship does not use the term *qualification* so freely.

Argument #26: A carnal Christian cannot exist and is a contradiction in terms.³² But Paul told the entire Corinthian church that they were *carnal* and *not spiritual*, but rather *babies*—yet they were his *brethren* and they were *in Christ* (I Cor. 3:1-3). He spoke of the fornicator in their membership being *delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (I Cor. 5:5). Then he instructs the church regarding how to disfellowship itself with certain extreme cases of carnal brethren—

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no, not to eat (I Cor. 5:11).

If the incestuous man could not possibly be a brother in Christ and if the nature of saving faith transcends all dispensations, how could Lot have been our brother in justification?—

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among

pay the ultimate price for salvation when our sinful self is nailed to the cross. It is a total abandonment of self-will...Nothing less can qualify as saving faith.”

³² Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 97 [footnote 2]: “Paul’s words to the Corinthians, ‘Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?’ (I Cor. 3:3, KJV), were not meant to establish a special class of Christianity. These were not people living in static disobedience; Paul does not suggest that carnality and rebellion were the rule in their lives. In fact, he said of these same people, ‘you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1:7, 8). Nevertheless, by having taken their eyes off Christ and created religious celebrities (3:4, 5), they were behaving in a carnal way. Contrast Paul’s words about the incestuous man in chapter 5. Paul calls him a ‘so-called brother’ (v. 11). He doesn’t say the man is not a Christian, but because of the pattern of gross sin, Paul could not affirm him as a brother.” Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 126: “But never in any of his epistles did [Paul] the apostle address two classes of believers....So according to Paul, *all* Christians are spiritual.”

them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds (II Pet. 2:6-8).

Yet Paul thanked God that the Corinthians had *come behind in no gift*—speaking of spiritual gifts (I Cor. 1:4-7). Obviously, spiritual giftedness and spirituality were two separate subjects with Paul. But when Paul told the Corinthians that they *walk as men* (I Cor. 1:3), he was implying that they were walking like unsaved.

In I Cor. 3:15 Paul is describing a saint at the judgment seat of Christ where his works are being tried by fire. After the fire goes out, there is left only the foundation—Jesus Christ—and a pile of ashes—fruitlessness. Carnality was this man's life's story—the same as the life of Samson. Yet Paul says that though this carnal *man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

When writing to the Romans, Paul assumed that there existed brethren—recipients of God's mercies—who had not sacrificially presented themselves to Christ for service but were instead conformed to this world. He stresses to these brothers in Christ that this is unholy, unacceptable, and unreasonable—

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.* And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God* (Rom. 12:1, 2).

It cannot be argued that the flesh does not have a will or that it is not carnal by nature. Actually, to be carnal is to be fleshly. The old man (or old nature) in a Christian still exists and is carnal and fleshly in its mind and will. There was no eradication at salvation, for it is this carnal nature that needs to be mortified by the saint. Paul was speaking to brethren when he said:

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live (Rom. 8:12, 13).

Argument #27: Nothing less than total yieldedness to the lordship of Christ can qualify as saving faith.³³ However, we can be certain that there were some dimensions in the Corinthian's lives that were not yielded to Christ's lordship. The incestuous brother in I Cor. 5 turned out to be an actual brother. He responded to Paul's prescribed church discipline and the Corinthians were ordered to receive him back into their fellowship (II Cor. 2:6-11). Where does the Bible teach that those who do not

³³ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 33: "Thus salvation cannot be defective in any dimension. As a part of His saving work, God will produce repentance, faith, sanctification, yieldedness, obedience, and ultimately glorification. Since He is not dependent on human effort in producing those elements, an experience that lacks any of them cannot be the saving work of God." PP. 139, 140: "...saving faith retains no privileges. It clings to no cherished sins, no treasured possessions, no secret self-indulgences. It is an unconditional surrender, a willingness to do anything the Lord demands...It is an exchange of all that we are for all that Christ is. And it denotes implicit obedience, full surrender to the lordship of Christ. Nothing less can qualify as saving faith." P. 167: "That demands a spiritual crisis leading to a complete turnaround and ultimately a wholesale transformation. It is the only kind of conversion Scripture recognizes." Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 61: "But by transforming the heart, grace makes the believer wholly willing to trust and obey." P. 33: "Therefore sinners cannot come to sincere faith apart from a complete change of heart, a turn-around of the mind and affections and will."

respond to church discipline could never have been saved in the first place? The Corinthians who are now *asleep* [dead], obviously did not respond to any discipline—including the Lord's (I Cor. 11:30).

However, some authors say that a believer may turn away almost completely, experiencing more failure than success. But how do we determine when carnality is complete? We cannot!

Argument #28: An individual who rejects the final phase of church discipline

is to be regarded as an unregenerate whose salvation is to be sought—³⁴

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Matt. 18:15-17).

On the other hand, making unresponsiveness in church discipline a point in the plan of salvation is a dangerous approach, especially in light of the fact that Jesus calls this trespasser a brother. This argument seems to make membership in the visible church essential to salvation because the visible church has no jurisdiction on those who are outside. Look at the passage in Matthew again in light of II Thess. 3:14, 15—

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.

When a church disassociates with a member it has completed the last stage of church discipline. Then why admonish him as a brother if he is not to be considered a Christian?

The Corinthian church was told to complete the last stage of discipline on the incestuous man to the extent that no one was to eat with him (I Cor. 5:7, 11). Yet later Paul told them that one of the devices of Satan would be fulfilled if they did not receive this same man back into their fellowship after his repentance (II Cor. 2:6-11). Does anyone ever ask why the church was not told to discipline the fornicating woman in this scenario. If she was not a sister in Christ, it was not the church's business to deal with

³⁴ Ibid., *Faith Works*, P. 192: "How long can a person continue in sin before we 'conclude that [he or she] was never really saved?' all the way through the discipline process....The Church discipline process our Lord outlined in Matthew 18 is predicated on the doctrine of perseverance. Those who remain hardened in sin only demonstrate their lack of true faith." Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus* [Revised Edition] pp. 274, 275, On Matt. 18:15-18: "Notice that the discipline process Jesus outlined is specifically intended to answer the question of whether a person in sin is a true brother or an outsider. 'if he listens to you [if he repents], you have won your brother' (v. 15). But ultimately, 'if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer' (v. 17)—That is, regard him as an unbeliever and pursue him evangelistically....No one who persists in willful, deliberate sin and rebellion against the Lord should be encouraged with any promise of assurance. If you know someone like that who professes faith in Christ, follow the process of Matthew 18 and call that person to repentance. But do not encourage him or her with the promise of security."

her—*For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within?* (I Cor. 5:12).

Argument #29: Positional and personal/practical sanctification are indivisibly the same.³⁵ Then why does the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews see the two sanctifications as disconnected? In Heb. 10:10-14 the believer is sanctified *once for all* and is *perfected forever*. But if he forsakes the assembly (vs. 25), he has *trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace* (vs. 29). If this person was ever sanctified positionally, it was *once for all* and *forever*. So, if positional sanctification is *once for all* at conversion and personal/practical sanctification is progressive, how can they be one and the same? They cannot!

If positional and progressive sanctification are one, then why do Christians have to be told to not yield their members *as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin* (Rom. 6:13)? Why would God need to cleanse confessing Christians of *all unrighteousness* if their personal/practical righteousness is the righteousness of God (I Jn. 1:7, 9, 10)? If the imputed righteousness of Christ is perfection by divine decree (II Cor. 5:21) and practical righteousness is short of sinless perfection, how can the two be one and the same righteousness?

Argument #30: There cannot exist a Christian who is fruitless in the eyes of other saints.³⁶ In the parable of the vineyard (John 15:1-8) we see unfruitful branches broken off, dried up, gathered up, and cast into fire. This parable is used to argue that fruitlessness results in eternal damnation. But the audience in these eight verses are a group of eleven born again men. Jesus is definitely not guaranteeing them that they will bear fruit, but He does warn everyone of them, except Judas, to abide in Him. Why exhort them to do something that, by God's sovereignty, they cannot fail to do?

The term *abide* does not discuss salvation, but rather fellowship and communion with Jesus Christ. When one ceases to abide in Christ, fruitlessness will result. Jesus is telling the disciples that this could happen to them. Shortly thereafter, it did happen to all eleven of the disciples as they all *forsook Him and fled* (Matt. 26:56). If not abiding is impossible, then it is pointless to warn saints that they must abide. On the other hand, if this parable is describing the terms of salvation, and if the fruitless branches are lost, how could they have ever been living branches in the first place?

Hell is real and is not a parable. But the fire in this story is parabolic. Sometimes the term *fire* metaphorically represents the chastisement of God. The term *fire* can refer to the judgment of God on His own people this side of the grave (Ps. 21:8-10; 79:5; 89:46; 97:2-5; Isa. 5:24, 25; 10:17-19; 29:5-7; Jer. 4:4; 7:20; 15:14; 17:27; 21:12; Amos

³⁵ *Ibid.*, *Faith Works*, p. 106: "Nowhere in Scripture do we find positional righteousness set against righteous behavior, as if the two realities were innately disconnected...What is no-lordship theology but the teaching that those who have died to sin can indeed live in it? In that regard, no-lordship teaching rests on the same foundation as the doctrine of the 'positional truth' zealot I have just described. It separates justification from sanctification."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, *Gospel According To Jesus* [Revised Edition], p. 171: "And so the fruitless branches represent counterfeit disciples—people who were never really saved. They do not abide in Christ, the True Vine; they are not truly united with Him by faith....The imagery of burning suggests that these fruitless branches are doomed to hell. Like Judas, they are hopeless apostates."

1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14). Why must we suppose that the metaphorical use of *fire* in Christ's parable is a reference to eternal damnation? The Apostle Peter uses the term *fire* as a reference to the temporal trials of the born again saint (I Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12).

Some, to support the view of eternal damnation in this parable, will cite Isa. 5:1-7 as a parallel illustration. The Isaiah passage is also a metaphor of a vineyard. However, the passage in Isaiah clearly speaks of God's historical judgment of Israel in the land of Palestine. The Isaiah context is not about everlasting life.

Jesus is teaching that if a believer fails to abide in Christ, he would be broken off from communion with Him. In such a case he should expect to experience the judgment of God as his experience with Christ's fellowship dries up and withers. The next experience of this believer will be to know the fiery chastisement of God. Peter describes this as the state of a born again Christian—

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten **that he was purged from his old sins** (II Pet. 1:8, 9). [Emphasis added].

In a literal vine, such broken and withered branches cannot be restored but broken fellowship with Christ can be restored in the prayer and confession of I Jn. 1:7, 9. Remember how the Apostle Peter denied Christ with a curse and yet Jesus had said to him: *and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren* (Lk. 22:32). The Laodicean brethren were so broken and withered in their communion with Christ that He wanted to spit them out of His mouth. Yet, He was standing ready to restore them to fellowship—*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent* (Rev. 3:19). Christ is not portraying Himself in this passage as standing at the heart's door of a lost person, but rather of those in the Laodicean church—*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me* (Rev. 3:20). Here Jesus is expressing the desire to restore broken communion between Himself and the members of the church—*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches* (Rev. 3:22).

Argument #31: The NT teaches that those who commit the works of the flesh will not go to heaven—

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9, 10).³⁷

³⁷ Ibid., *Faith Works*, p. 127: "In those verses the apostle Paul was describing sins of chronic behavior, sins that color one's whole character. A predilection for such sins reflects an unregenerate heart." Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, pp. 215, 216: "Paul's doctrine of justification by faith makes it

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetuous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5).

However, going to heaven and the degree of the believer's inheritance upon arrival are two separate subjects in the NT. Eternal life is purchased one hundred percent by the finished work of Christ, but the degree in which one will abundantly enter the kingdom will be an award for the saint's faithfulness during his mortal life. Michael Eaton explains this concept with several important observations.

Consider Gal. 5:21 and its companion-passages in I Cor. 6:9 and Eph. 5:5. Paul warns: "Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"...

Paul includes *thumoi*, outbursts of wrath, yet Calvin confessed shortly before his death that he was prone to impatience and bad temper which, he said, was part of his nature but concerning which he was ashamed [see T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin* (Lion, 1975), p. 181]. Had he lost his salvation? Paul includes *dichostasiai*, dissensions, and *eritheiai*, rivalries. Yet A. Dillimore entitled a chapter of his biography of George Whitefield "Dissensions and Rivalries in England". [See A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, vol.2 (Banner of Truth, 1980), ch. 16]. Were George Whitefield and John Wesley not Christians after all? One remembers also that Luke records a "sharp disagreement (*paraxusmos*) between Paul and Barnabas on one occasion (Ac. 15:39). Did Paul fall prey to his own warning? Was he in danger of losing—or falsifying—his salvation?

Does it mean that those who are guilty of such things but do not repent do not inherit God's kingdom? Yet do not some Christians remain blind to their weaknesses all their lives? Was not Luther quite blind to the sinfulness of his hostility to fellow reformers? Does not his story indicate that he never did repent of his attitude to Zwingli and others? [See R. H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, (originally Abingdon, 1950; 1978 rp), pp. 248-251]. Was not Melancthon nervous even of letting him see Calvin's letter to him because he feared a violent reaction? [See J. Calvin, *Letters*, (Banner of Truth, 1980), p. 71]. Is not the attitude of some Calvinists towards what they think is "antinomian" itself not rather antinomian?³⁸

...Surely Calvin lost something at that very point of his life when he lost his temper. Surely the rivalry between Wesley and Whitefield did damage to the kingdom of God and brought blessing to neither of them at that stage of their life...

impossible for people to lay hold of Christ without letting go of sin. Consider these passages: (I Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5...)"

³⁸ Eaton makes the following note from J. Gerstner, *A Primer on Justification* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1983), p. 16: "Gerstner maintains that 'antinomians' (American dispensationalist evangelicals) sing: 'Free from the Law, O blessed condition, / I can sin as I please and still have remission.' But Bliss's hymn reads: 'Free from the Law, O blessed condition, / Jesus hath bled and there is remission' and continues: 'Children of God', O glorious calling, / Surely his grace will keep us from falling.'

It is important to distinguish between justification and reward...We should also take seriously the absence from the New Testament of any reference to reversal of justification-regeneration...³⁹

So, I Cor. 6:9, 10 refers to a brother in Christ who forfeits his inheritance within the kingdom of God because of his *works of the flesh*. This is speaking of his conditional inheritance that is contingent upon his personal righteousness. However, he is still a brother in Christ who will enter heaven according to his eternal inheritance of salvation.

But what of verse 11 which says: *And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God?* Notice the word *you* in verse 11 and compare it with the word *ye* in verse 8—*Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren*. A fraud and an extortioner are both thieves. Thus, the brother in verse 8 will forfeit his inheritance also, but he is still a brother. Verse 7 describes the utter failure of such a brother in Christ—*Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?*

Again, note the word *you* in verse 11 and the word *fornication* in verse 9 and then compare with the word *you* in I Cor. 5:1—*It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife*. This is a man who is forfeiting his inheritance in heaven, but, if he were to be destroyed by Satan at that moment, would his spirit be saved?—*To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (I Cor. 5:5). Note the distinction between the fornicators of this world and a fornicator of the brethren. They are to be treated differently because they are different—

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (I Cor. 5:9-13).

So, just as Paul said *such were some of you*, it could be stated just as correctly that *such still are many of you*. Because this is such an important point of contention, let us illustrate our position with an analogy from two separate inheritances for OT Jews.

The inheritance of the Abrahamic Covenant included unconditional promises of possessing the land of Canaan during the millennium and on into eternity (Acts 7:5; Heb. 11:8, 10). This will be a *forever* possession (Ex. 32:13; Gen. 12:1, 7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:7, 8). In Judges 2:1 God promises unconditionally never to break this covenant. Though Israel forsook God and was chastised by Him, He did not utterly forsake them but determined to fulfil the Abrahamic Covenant by grace and mercy (Neh. 9:7, 8, 15-19; cf.

³⁹ Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 204-206—This book is strongly recommended as definitive reading to anyone interested in the *Lordship Salvation* Debate.

vss. 30, 31). In Neh. 9:38 the Israelites made a conditional covenant with God claiming possession of the land contingent on obedience to the Law of Moses. But during the divided monarchy, the Jews were separated into the ten northern tribes of Israel and the two southern tribes of Judah. Ezekiel prophesied a time during the millennium when the two shall be one again and possess the land unconditionally as a gift—and not by conquest (Ez. 37:15-26). This will be the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant promise of an eternal land inheritance for Israel. In Ez. 16 God refers to Israel as an unrepenting harlot (16:35, 58, 59; cf. entire chapter). Yet, even though they had despised the Word of God, He refers again to the unconditional nature of His original covenant (Vs. 60)—*Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.* The future glory of Zion is further described in Isa. 60:21, 22. This is the fulfillment of the promise that Israel will inhabit the land as an inheritance forever. Zechariah also describes the future glory of Zion's possession of the promised land (Zech. 8:12). Even the Psalmist mentions the unconditional eternity of the Abrahamic Covenant (Ps. 105:8-10).

But, in a totally different light, the inheritance of the Mosaic Covenant provides for a conditional possession of the land this side of the millennium and eternity. Accordingly, some will inherit more than others (Nu. 26:52-54). Possessing the Mosaic inheritance of the land was contingent on dispossessing the former inhabitants. If Israel failed to do this, God would dispossess them from the land as He intended to dispossess the Canaanites (Nu. 33:50-56). Possessing the Mosaic inheritance was also contingent on obedience to the Mosaic statutes (Deut 4:1, 2). Josh. 13:1 speaks of Israel's failure to take possession of *very much* of the land that had been promised. Judges 2:2-3 records God's refusal to drive the inhabitants of the land out because Israel broke the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant by making leagues with the inhabitants and by not throwing down their altars. David counseled Israel to seek and keep all the commandments of the Lord as a condition for inheriting the land (I Chron. 28:8). Jeremiah calls for repentance and obedience as a condition for dwelling in the land in 610 B.C.—a land which had been promised to the fathers *forever and ever* unconditionally (Jer. 32:3-7). Isaiah asked God to return the Mosaic inheritance which he confessed that Israel deserved to lose (Isa. 63:17, 18).

We must not fail to distinguish between the Abrahamic Covenant's unconditional promises of inheritance and the Mosaic conditional promises of inheritance. The unconditional promises of inheritance to Abraham cannot be disannulled (Gal. 3:15-18), whereas the conditional covenant of Moses can and has been disannulled (Heb. 7:18, 19). Thus, there is the Abrahamic promise to the redeemed of Israel that they will unconditionally inherit the land forever beginning with the millennium, and then there is the Mosaic promise that possession of the promised land this side of the millennium and eternity is contingent upon conquest and national obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

In like manner, the NT saint has an inheritance which is Christ Himself and eternal life. This is a free gift of grace and mercy and not conditioned in any way upon personal righteousness. But there is also a second, and distinct, inheritance for the saint that is conditioned upon works of righteousness which he has done. This second inheritance is not a gift, but a reward for faithfulness, overcoming and suffering.

Christ is the unconditional inheritance of every believer equally because He is their eternal life (I Pet. 1:1-5; I Jn. 1:1-3; Jn. 14:6; Heb. 9:15; Ps. 16:5). Paul illustrates

this by describing believers as having sometimes been foolish, disobedient, deceived, lustful, malicious, envious and hateful (Titus 3:3, 4). He then makes it clear that our inheritance is not by *works of righteousness which we have done* but that we are declared justified by the grace and mercy of God. Yet, in verses 8-11 Paul wants Titus constantly to exhort believers to maintain good works in order to avoid heresies which subvert. Thus, being a justified believer by the grace and mercy of God and realizing the importance of maintaining good works are two very important, yet distinct, subjects.

Believers receive the eternal inheritance of salvation and Christ Himself by faith without the addition of any other works of personal righteousness (Rom. 4:5; 3:28). This inheritance is shared equally with all believers (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:11, 14; II Tim. 1:9). However, the believer must distinguish between his eternal inheritance of salvation and to what extent he will share in all things that Christ has inherited (Heb. 1:1, 2; Col. 3:24, 25).

Being an heir of God is to be born again, but being a joint-heir with Christ and thus receiving a portion of all that is His inheritance requires, among other things, faithfulness in suffering (Rom. 8:17, 18). For instance, not everyone will reign with Christ to the same degree (Lk. 19:17, 19, 24), but the actual degree will be partially measured by faithfulness in suffering (II Tim. 2:12). Eternal life is one thing, but the crown of life will belong to those who are faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10; cf. I Tim. 3:11; II Tim. 2:2).

Eph. 1:11 speaks of an inheritance that all believers already have, and yet II Pet. 3:9 speaks of an inherited blessing that is contingent upon proper Christian behavior. So, to be a joint-heir with Christ will entitle the suffering saint to share even more in the glory of the Son (I Pet. 4:13; cf. vss. 16, 19).⁴⁰

Joint-heirship with Christ is conditioned upon the believer becoming an overcomer. Of course, when a believer exercises faith in Christ, he does overcome the world in that sense (I Jn. 5:4, 5). Becoming born again is a unique victory over the world. But this does not mean that all Christians are all equally overcomers in their personal day-to-day lives. This is something that the NT nowhere guarantees. Otherwise, why would Paul say to saints: *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good* (Rom. 12:21) if this could never happen to a believer? Why would Paul tell the brethren of Rome, who had received saving mercy, that not presenting their bodies to God's service was *unholy, unacceptable, unreasonable* and is to be *conformed to this world* (Rom. 12:1, 2)?

Rev. 2:7 describes the privilege of eating from the tree of life in heaven. But there is no living tree anywhere that can bestow eternal life. Everlasting life is bestowed through the death of Christ in His finished work of salvation. But the right to the *hidden manna* belongs to the believer who is an overcomer (Rev. 2:17; cf. 22:14, 19).

Power over the nations will be awarded in proportions (Lk. 19) but the degrees will be contingent upon keeping the works of Christ unto the end as an overcomer (Rev. 2:26). It is the overcoming Christian who will be made a pillar in the Temple of God (Rev. 3:12). It is the overcoming Christian that will reign to the ultimate degree with

⁴⁰ See also Acts 5:41; 9:16; I Cor. 4:12; 9:12; II Cor. 1:6, 7; Gal. 5:11, 12; Phil. 1:29; 3:8, 10; 4:12; I Thess. 3:4; II Thess. 1:5; I Tim. 4:10; I Pet. 2:19, 20; 3:14, 17; 4:13, 16, 19; Rev. 2:10).

Christ (Rev. 3:21). And, believers who are overcomers to the greatest extent will share the most in all that Christ has inherited (Rev. 21:7; cf. Heb. 1:1, 2; Ps. 37:18).

Several deductions can be made from the foregoing analogies. First, the believer's eternal inheritance of salvation cannot be diminished (Heb. 1:14). Second, the believer's inheritance, which is not a gift but rather a graded reward, can be diminished through unfaithfulness (II Jn. 8; Col. 2:18; 3:24). Third, a heaven-bound believer can commit the works of the flesh and thus diminish his inheritance when he enters the kingdom of God for eternity (Rom. 6:19; 7:18, 25; 13:14; I Cor. 5:5; 7:28; II Cor. 7:1; Gal. 5:13, 16, 17, 19-21, 26; 6:8; Phil. 3:4; I Pet. 2:11; 4:2; I Jn. 2:15, 16). Fifth, believers are heirs of God equally, but they become joint-heirs with Christ in proportion to their faithfulness, overcoming, and suffering with Christ. Sixth, Jesus Christ is now the appointed heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). If inheriting the kingdom of God means that all Christians shall inherit all that Christ has inherited as joint-heirs with Him, then there can be no degrees of reward and the judgment seat of Christ will be pointless.

So, there is an inheritance which is a gift and an inheritance which is a reward. Even a novice will see this distinction when reading Col. 3:24—*Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.*⁴¹

Some who back-load the gospel with personal obedience in all things seem very confused when they deny that baptism is included in these mandatory acts of submission to the lordship of Christ.

When *they of the circumcision* back-loaded the death, burial and resurrection of Christ with circumcision and law, it became another gospel which could not save—

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

In the next, and final, chapter of this present work, we will respond to the charge that we are causing division in the true Body of Christ by hesitating to accept works and sacraments as also the gospel of Christ. Are we guilty of *butchering* Christ and His body by being so definitive in the gospel? This charge strikes fear in the hearts of perhaps tens of thousands of evangelicals world-wide, and entices them to embrace an apostate gospel for the sake of unity.

⁴¹ There are two important works which address the distinction between the conditional and the unconditional inheritance of the Christian: Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co, 1992) and Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1992).