

# Assurance of Heaven

## You Can Know Where You Will Spend Eternity

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*By*  
*George Mains*

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# Introduction

Are you one hundred percent sure you will go to heaven? Many Christians do not have assurance for a number of reasons. Some begin to doubt after they are saved. They think it is impossible to know. Others may be ignorant of their position as a child of God. Many begin to question their salvation because they are subtly taught to look at their performance. Are you good enough? Have you done enough?

The Bible says you can know you have everlasting life (I John 5:13). Believing the right gospel should give you one hundred percent assurance. But many who profess to know Jesus do not know for sure, because they are subtly taught a performance-based salvation. If you judge your salvation upon your personal goodness and what you do, you will never be absolutely sure that you will go to heaven.

Today you can listen to a variety of teachers on the radio, television, and internet. Study Bibles and commentaries can add to the confusion as well. Popularity doesn't mean a preacher's teachings are correct. Most of those who preach via modern day media do so because they are financed by people who are in agreement with their doctrine. If you are not grounded in the Biblical gospel, you may be misled. A wrong understanding of the gospel will cause you to lack assurance.

There are those who teach you can lose your salvation. Others believe baptism is necessary. Still others think religious sacraments are needed to get to heaven. Confusion about salvation abounds in the church, and it usually affects most everyone at some point. Listening to an unbiblical gospel creates spiritual fogginess about salvation. This book comes from my own personal spiritual misunderstandings, pitfalls, and experiences. Some of it came from my own doings, and some from listening to the wrong people.

*Assurance of Heaven* will help you look at what you understand concerning getting to heaven and evaluate it by Scripture. If you are a child of God by faith in Jesus, you are completely forgiven and restored. Heaven is sure for anyone in Christ. Believing the Biblical gospel is absolutely necessary for eternal life, living a life pleasing to God, and that is good for you. This book will answer some questions about Christian teaching today and why it often adds more uncertainty to salvation than helping.

The gospel is absolutely free. Anyone can receive everlasting life by faith in Jesus Christ. Before Jesus died, He said, "It is finished" (John 19:29). Learn to trust what God said. Stop listening to those who confuse the good news. Assurance comes when you stop looking at yourself and in faith look to Jesus. Trusting His promise of everlasting life, by faith alone in Christ alone, is the only solution to erasing doubts. Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47). It really is that simple.

# The BIBLE

“The B-I-B-L-E, yes, that’s the book for me.” That was a song many sang in Sunday school as a youngster. The Bible is a big book that is made up of sixty-six books written by forty authors over a period of fifteen hundred years to different groups of people with amazing harmony and continuity. Assurance comes from knowing God through knowing His word.

When you understand the Bible in its proper context you will see that most of the New Testament books are written to churches, to the saints. Saints are simply believers. It is the instruction book for those who have become a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

It is written for the purpose of learning how to grow as His child. There are New Testament verses about how to be saved, justification. But much of it instructs believers about our position in Christ and to live a life as a child of God that is consistent with our position. The Bible exhorts believers not to fall away; to persevere in trials and tribulations. There are instructions to believers not to live like the unbelieving world. However, Christians are never told to judge their salvation according to their behavior. Learned men teach that you can judge a person’s salvation based upon their conduct. The Bible doesn’t.

That’s why listening only to a man or woman for truth can be detrimental. People get Biblical truth wrong all the time. Some leaders and teachers are ignorant. Some do it for personal gain. Some may do it merely as a way to make a living. Sometimes it is an honest mistake. Whatever the reason, never simply believe what the preacher or teacher tells you about the Bible, including the writer of this book. No human gets it all right. We all have wrongly interpreted the Bible because we are human and we are imperfect. But making mistakes in main and essential areas of understanding the Bible can have a significant impact on life and even for eternity.

Many people think you have to have a seminary degree to preach or teach the Bible. But when you examine commentaries written by educated men, you soon discover there is a considerable amount of disagreement even in some significant areas of doctrine. And think about it for a second. Were the Apostles educated men? When Peter and John came before the Sanhedrin, they marveled “when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). They didn’t have degrees. They were just faithful and teachable, and they had been with Jesus. This isn’t to demean seminary education. But there are many seminaries, and they teach different things. You can always find a school that agrees with your theology.

Do not be misled. Be a Berean. The people in Berea checked out what the apostle Paul was teaching. They “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). And so should you. It’s for your own spiritual well-being.

Growing in your relationship with God necessitates a teachable attitude. A teachable attitude requires humility. Reading and understanding Scripture is not solely to gain knowledge. Knowledge puffs up. The purpose of knowing is to apply those truths in your life. The study of God’s Word is to know Him. It’s a relational skill that is necessary to deepen and develop your fellowship with Him. His Word should be “a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105). Job treasured the

Word of God more than his necessary food (Job 23:12). Jesus said “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). That’s how important His Word is in our walk of faith. Like physical food nourishes our body, His word is spiritual food that nourishes our soul.

God gave us the Bible to train us. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:16-17). Apart from God’s Word, it would be impossible to grow up to any degree of spiritual maturity.

Prayer is also an important aspect in our relationship with God. He speaks to us through His word, the Bible. We speak to Him through prayer. But praying alone is merely a one-sided conversation. Have you ever talked with someone or instead listened to someone in a one-sided conversation? Not much of a relationship can be built when only one person is doing all of the talking. Because God is our Father, we need to hear from Him. That’s our greatest need.

If you are not engaging with God regularly through His word, you will be easily deceived into believing a spiritual lie. There is spiritual warfare in this life that most believers fail to recognize. It plays out in human affairs. A lie just may be whispered in your ear, “You’re too bad. God will never accept you. Look at what you did.” Or you may be led to believe that you haven’t done enough to earn God’s favor. But according to Jesus, there is no one too bad that he cannot save. And it is impossible to do enough to earn His favor. He did it all. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47). Getting to heaven does not depend on how good or bad you are. It depends on who you have trusted. Don’t doubt God’s Word. Believe it! If you are looking for assurance, take God at His word.

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1. The Bible is God’s word written for us. How important is it in my relationship with God? Matthew 4:4
  2. How important was it to Job? Job 23:12
  3. What does God’s word do for us? Psalm 119:105; II Tim. 3:16, 17

**Points to Ponder:** The Bible is an essential tool in living the Christian life. Reading it is certainly something that we should do daily; not for an academic pursuit but out of a desire to know Him (Phil. 3:10). The Spirit of God is the agent and the Word of God is the instrument that He uses to develop us into mature believers (II Tim. 3:16). It is valuable food for a believer to grow spiritually; to deepen their relationship with the Lord. One of the first things you think about after getting out of bed is breakfast. Food is important for our survival. How well would you do if you ate one meal a week? The Bible is spiritual food. How will I grow spiritually on one or two meals of His word a week?

# Spiritual Warfare: Our Three Enemies

The Bible teaches that the devil is real and “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Jesus described him as a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44). He deceives by transforming himself into an angel of light! (II Cor. 11:14) The language of God is truth. Lies come from the evil one. Through deceit he takes people captive to do his will (II Tim. 2:26). Most people think of him as the caricature with horns, a tail, and a pitchfork. But he is way more deceptive than that. The good-looking guy with the three-piece suit in the pulpit could well be representing him (II Cor. 11:13-15).

The second aspect of warfare is the world system designed by the devil. God has given him temporary limited authority (Luke 4:6; Rev. 20:10). The whole world lies under his influence (1 John 5:19). He has created the world system to appeal to the old nature. He designed it to keep people distracted so they fail to see a need for God and to divert believers from pursuing their relationship with Him.

The third aspect of spiritual warfare involves the heart of every human being. Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God causing the nature of their being to change. At their spiritual core they became fallen sinful creatures. They would pass on that fallen nature to every future generation. The result is that every person is a sinner by nature and by practice (Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 7:18). For example, why do you have to teach young children to tell the truth? Who teaches a youngster to lie? They learn to lie all by themselves. It’s the expression of the sin nature within them.

The Bible describes our nature this way: “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). [The heart is the inner control center of man involving the mind, will, and emotions.] As a result the world system created by the devil is designed to tempt our hearts through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I John 2:15-17).

When we are saved from the penalty of sin, we instantaneously become a new creation in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). But God doesn’t eradicate the old nature. He gives us a new nature that is created in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24). This causes conflict in the heart of the believer. “The flesh [old nature] lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Gal. 5:17). Ignorance of this enemy triad [the devil, the world system, and our old fallen nature] can lead to destructive outcomes. All three conspire together to sabotage a believer. They incite rebellion in us [via the old nature] to keep us from developing a deeper relationship with God.

The sin nature influenced by the devil and the world system targets our emotions. It provokes our sin nature to respond in the circumstances of life to damage our relationship with God and with one another. However, God works in the opposite way. He targets our mind through His Word to affect change in our will, and the appropriate emotions will follow. Think of it this way. The mind is the engine, the will is the coal car following, and the caboose is the emotion at the end of the train. Emotions are not always bad. But God did not intend for them to lead our decision making.

Failing to understand the tactics of these three enemies will defeat us and cause ongoing failure in our walk with God. The solution is to know our enemy and to execute our defense by putting; “on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:1-12). The spiritual combat in the heavens is at war to control the minds of people.

One of those battles for the mind is the way I think about my relationship with God. Our three enemies work in concert to cause us to question our assurance. Lack of assurance often comes when I neglect God’s word. It opens the door for my old nature to deceive me into believing a lie. I will invent a concept of God’s love and forgiveness that is unbiblical. Sometimes teachers and preachers reinforce that false concept feeding my insecurity. In the next chapters we will see how these three enemies attempt to distort the gospel, the heart of the Christian faith.

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1. What is the devil trying to do? I Peter 5:8
  2. How is he described? John 8:44; II Cor. 11:14
  3. How much of the world is influenced by him? I John 5:19
  4. What other enemy do we have? Jeremiah 17:9
  5. What ways are we being tempted? I John 2:15-17
  6. How do I combat these influences? Ephesians 6:1-12
  7. How does God attempt to influence us? Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23

Points to Ponder: When you believe the gospel you are born again. God gives us a new nature, but He doesn’t eradicate the old nature. The old nature is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it” (Jer. 17:9). The fallen nature attempts to deceive us in many ways. Proverbs 4:23 cautions, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life”. Be careful what you put into your mind. Feed your new nature with the word of God.

# What is the Gospel?

To have assurance you must know the Biblical gospel. Many churches are not on mission with Jesus to preach the gospel and make disciples (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). He instructed His disciples to “observe all the things” that He commanded them (Matt. 28:20). Every succeeding generation is commanded to do the same. But failure to do this has left many people in the church confused about what the gospel is.

From the time we are little we are taught to perform. As a toddler if you are good, you get to go to the Dairy Queen. If you do well in school, you may be rewarded with a scholarship. If you work hard in your career, you will get a raise and may be promoted. Everything we know is based upon our performing. We learn to behave and act ‘right’ to receive the reward. We think God operates the same way; that He will accept me because of my good performance. But that is a lie from the devil. In comparison to God who is holy, “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

To fight these wrong thoughts, we need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. The word ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’. Good news implies there is bad news. The bad news is that we are sinners by nature and by practice helpless to fix our situation. Our sin has separated us from God and we are under His wrath. If nothing changes, we will perish (Rom. 6:23). If we perish, we will experience eternal death; separation from God forever in the Lake of Fire (I Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:15).

But the gospel is good news! The Bible defines it in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4: “Moreover brethren I delivered to you the gospel... For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” The first thing the apostle shared with them was the gospel. Jesus Christ, fully God and fully Man shed His blood to pay the penalty for our sins. He died in our place. He is our sufficient Substitute. He was buried in a tomb and on the third day He rose from the grave being seen by over five hundred brethren, proving that He has the power over sin and death (I Cor. 15:5-9).

Because our sin has separated us from God, you must understand your dilemma. Apart from Christ you will perish. But when you understand and believe the gospel, you are immediately saved from the penalty of sin [perishing]. You are restored to a relationship with God. Nothing can snatch you out of His hand. You shall never perish (John 10:28). You are eternally secure!

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). Believing is a faith response. It requires that an individual understands his or her fallen condition. You agree with God that you are a condemned sinner in need of a Savior. Then you believe the gospel. The word “believe” in the Bible means to be persuaded of, to put confidence in. Believing is an act of faith. “To believe in His name” means to accept the truth about His identity and His history. His identity is that He came to earth fully Human and fully God (John 1:1, 14; Phil. 2:7). His history is that he lived a sinless life to be the perfect sacrifice. He died in our place for our sins and rose again bodily on the third day.

When you believe the good news you are justified by faith. “Man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16). Justification is the act whereby our legal standing has changed in the court room of God. The perfect righteousness of Christ is credited to the sinner who trusts in Christ alone (II Cor. 5:21). God declares the sinner righteous in his standing with Him; no longer guilty. Instantaneously you pass from eternal death to eternal life and are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His Son (John 5:24; Col. 1:13). It is a one-time act of hearing [understanding the gospel] and believing it, which causes an irreversible change in your final destiny.

Salvation is not a work of man. It is a work of God. The only condition is for the individual to believe the gospel. “*But to him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness*” (Rom. 4:5, emphasis mine).

### **Salvation is a Gift**

Trying to live a good life, giving to charities, going to church, baptism, or any other type of human effort cannot take away your sins or earn favor with God. The Bible says salvation is the gift of God. Look closely at Ephesians 2:8 and 9. “*For by grace you have been saved [past tense moment of time] through faith [the way one receives the gift], and that not of yourselves [nothing one does]; it is the gift of God [The benefit of a gift requires nothing of the recipient other than receiving the gift]; not of works [turning from sin; reforming oneself; doing good things; not doing bad things; communion; baptism; etc.], lest anyone should boast [One could brag if it required works]* (Eph. 2:8-9, emphasis mine).

A gift is not earned. The only condition to benefit from a gift is simply to receive it from the giver. The very definition of a gift means there are no strings attached. There is no requirement to meet. For example, let’s say I give you a watch but you never wear it. Because you never wear it I ask for it back. That is not a gift. A gift has no conditions other than accepting it. You get to choose how you will use it. In the case of the watch, you decide how to use it and when to wear it. When it comes to the gift of salvation, you get to make daily choices about how you respond to the Giver of the gift. He doesn’t take it away if you do not respond appropriately.

It took one act of disobedience to plunge the entire human race into sin. Sinners only beget sinners. It’s in our DNA, so to speak, passed down from Adam. People wonder why the world is like it is. It’s because of sin. But the Lord gave Himself to us as the perfect sacrifice. He offers us a restored relationship purchased by Him at great cost through His Son. Anyone can receive the gift of salvation by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures. Have you received the gift of everlasting life by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone?

[See Appendix 1]

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1. What is the purpose of the church? Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15
  2. Who is Jesus? John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:5-8
  3. What did Jesus do for us? Hebrews 9:12, 22; I Corinthians 15:3, 4;
  4. What does sin earn for us? Romans 6:23 [Death in the Bible refers to separation, not cessation of existence.]

5. Can you be good enough for God? Romans 3:10
6. What is the gift of God? Ephesians 2:8, Romans 6:23
7. How do you receive the gift of God? John 1:12; 6:47; Gal. 3:26
8. What does 'believe' mean in the gospel of John 1:12?
9. If everlasting life is forever, is there anything you could do to forfeit it? John 10:27-29; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30
10. When you understand who Jesus is and what He did, what must you do to be saved from the penalty of sin? Acts 16:30, 31

Points to Ponder: There is only one gospel. Any additions make it another gospel. Often churches teach that the performance of good works, the promise of good works, or the evidence of good works must accompany faith in Christ to prove that such faith has resulted in eternal life. Good works and righteous living should occur after one is saved (Eph. 2:10). But they're not automatic and believers must be taught (Titus 3:8, 14). The sad truth is that a Christian who has everlasting life can be barren and unfruitful to a point that they forget that they have been cleansed from their sins (II Peter 1:8, 9).

# Understanding the Three Tenses of Salvation

Salvation includes the past, the present, and the future. Every believer has been delivered from the penalty of sin at the moment of faith in Christ. If we grow in our relationship with God, He delivers us daily from the power of sin. At death we enter into His presence and will be delivered from the very presence of sin. The penalty, power, and presence of sin parallel the Biblical terminology of justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Salvation from the penalty of sin is only the beginning of the race, not the end of the race. Churches often give the wrong impression of salvation. They fail to distinguish between being saved from the penalty of sin [justification] and from the power of sin [sanctification]. Failure to understand this distinction can cause a lack of spiritual growth and a lack of assurance.

Misunderstanding the three tenses of salvation also leads to confusion about the gospel. By adding sanctification truths [Ongoing commitment, faithfulness, and obedience] to justification, the deliverance from the penalty of sin becomes unclear. An unclear gospel eventually causes doubt and insecurity.

## **What does save mean?**

Most words have a variation of meaning. The context of a word in a sentence, in a paragraph, and a book defines the meaning. It's no different in the Bible. For example, if I ask you what the word "trunk" means, what would you say? You might say an elephant trunk, the trunk of a car, a tree trunk, the midsection of the body, or a storage chest. However, you can only guess what I mean until I use it in a sentence. So if I ask you to help me get the groceries out of the trunk after I had just come home from the store, you immediately would know what I meant. That's the way God has wired our brains to understand language.

Like the word 'trunk' the Biblical word 'save' also has several variations of meaning. It can mean to deliver from danger. "Then his disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Lord save us! We are perishing'" (Matt. 8:25)! If you didn't read the background of the passage, one could argue His disciples asked Jesus to save them from hell. But in the context you understand they had gotten into a boat with Jesus and a great storm arose, and they thought they would physically die. They asked Him to save them from drowning.

The second meaning is one that is often used, 'to be saved from hell'. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). It's apparent from the context that it is talking about sinners being delivered from the penalty of sin, eternal separation from God.

The third definition is often more difficult to detect. Many times it is confused with the second definition. God's desire is not only to save believers from the penalty of sin, but also from the bondage of sin, or the power of sin. It's the daily struggle between the old nature and the new nature. James wrote to believers, urging them to "lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to *save your soul*" (James 1:21

emphasis mine). Like the Corinthian church, as believers they were living carnally. They were allowing their old nature to control them. (1:8, 22; 2:3-4; 4:2, 3). He called them adulterers, meaning they were committing spiritual adultery by being a friend of the world (4:4). They were not being saved [delivered] from the power of sin. It was hurting their fellowship with one another and with the Lord.

Lastly, 'save' can be a reference to the deliverance of believers at the rapture or when we go to be with Him at physical death. It is the deliverance from the presence of sin. "And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11).

As a child of God there are consequences for sin and some of them can be significant. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he shall reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will reap of the Spirit everlasting life" (Gal. 6:7-8). The apostle is not saying everlasting life is earned by reaping. He is writing to believers to warn them that sowing to the flesh can lead to a ruined life. In comparison, sowing to the Spirit will reap in their physical life a quality that God calls everlasting life. For only in the Spirit can a believer realize that quality of life whereby he can be useful and fruitful to the Lord.

Once you are saved from the penalty of sin, you enter the phase of salvation referred to as sanctification [deliverance from the power of sin]. It's the daily battle that every believer experiences throughout life. In sanctification a believer should learn to surrender his will to God's will in the moments of time and the situations of life by faith. It's learning to trust God and His Word, depending on His power to give you the strength and ability to carry out His will, not my will. In sanctification you are being saved the same way you were saved in justification; by God's grace through faith. If we are to be delivered more and more from the power of sin, we must have the attitude of John the Baptist: "I must decrease, and He must increase" (John 3:30). John realized this was the only way he could be useful to the Master. And so it is with us.

### **The Vine Illustration**

Jesus gave His disciples a principle that we all need to understand. It was the parable of the vine: "I am the vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away [Or lifts up]; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:1-5).

Some observations about these verses:

- Jesus is the vine
  - He was speaking to His disciples about being fruitful for the Lord, not about how to be saved from the penalty of sin.
  - A branch bears fruit. It doesn't produce fruit.
  - Apart from the vine providing all the nutrients, a branch by itself cannot bear fruit.
  - They were saved from the penalty of sin, "every branch in Me." A branch [disciple] can only have the potential of bearing fruit if it is part of the vine [Jesus].

Apart from abiding in Him, disciples [branches] cannot bear fruit. His disciples were “in Him.” They were part of the vine. They were branches. But for them to bear fruit for God, they had to learn to abide in Him. Branches can’t produce any nutrients. It requires the root system of the vine to provide the things necessary to produce fruit. In the same way, Jesus will produce His fruit in us and through us when we abide in Him [the Vine].

*Menō* is the word in the Greek for abide. It has a wider meaning. It is translated as continue, dwell, endure, remain, stand, and tarry.<sup>1</sup> It paints a picture of a permanent continual close relationship with the Lord. When I stay connected to Him, I will bear fruit. However, if I depend on my own resources, I will fail to bear fruit. The power of the sin nature will control my life instead.

Trying to produce spiritual fruit in the old nature cannot be done. Apart from Jesus, it’s impossible to live the Christian life. When you realize that you can’t live the Christian life, your walk will gain traction. Realizing that I am simply a branch that only can bear fruit by abiding in Him will remove many spiritual burdens.

The vine illustration gives us a picture of abiding. In Biblical times they would place stones under the vine branches to keep them from touching the ground.<sup>2</sup> If the end of a branch touched the ground it would begin to root itself. It would then draw strength from its shallow roots rather than from the primary root system. Because of the shallowness of the roots, the branches would be unable to draw the nutrients to produce acceptable fruit. Therefore, the Father as the vinedresser prunes and lifts up the branches, so they don’t touch the ground. In doing so, the branches continue to draw from the root system and produce more fruit. He doesn’t take away the non-producing branches. He lifts them up. The primary meaning of the word is “lift up” as opposed to “take away”. He does all He can to help the branches stay connected to the Vine.

Abiding is not automatic. To be delivered from the power of sin you must be intentional in your effort to grow as His child by trusting in His power and presence. If you fail to learn to abide in Christ, you will be useless and unfruitful in this life. By depending on your power, you will wither like a branch that fails to draw resources from the root. Withered branches bear no fruit for they are not drawing energy from the root [Jesus]. They are useless.

The branches being burned is not a reference to hell. Jesus was speaking to believers [“anyone” includes His disciples] that fail to abide in Him. Fire represents the judgment of God on a believer’s works (I Cor. 3:13). Some believers will have all their works burned but they are still saved (I Cor. 3:15).

Understanding the distinction of the three tenses of salvation is essential to understanding the Bible. It’s key to living a functional, fruitful, and faithful life. The grace of God provides all that we need to live godly and faithfully in this life.

[See Appendix 2]

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<sup>1</sup> W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White Jr. *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Camden, New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 1 [New Testament].

<sup>2</sup> Jim Fleming, “Biblical Antiquity Center, Part 1,” online video, Christ in Prophecy.

1. What are the three tenses of salvation? I Timothy 2:4; James 1:21 & I Corinthians 3:3; Romans 13:11 [See the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph of chapter]
2. When does everlasting begin? John 5:24
3. What was John the Baptist's attitude concerning Jesus? John 3:30
4. In the Vine illustration, who was Jesus speaking to? John 13:22
5. As a believer, what can you do apart from Jesus? John 15:5
6. Can you produce spiritual fruit in the old nature? John 15:4; Romans 7:18
7. How did the apostle describe the saints in Corinth? I Corinthians 3:3 Were they saved from the penalty of sin? I Corinthians 1:2. 9

Points to Ponder: Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Do you really believe that? In the process of sanctification, when you try to live the Christian life you will fail. Trying means I am trusting in my effort. He wants you to trust Him and He will produce the results in you and through you. According to the Bible all of our righteousness is filthy rags (Is. 64:6). We cannot generate any righteousness in the power of our old nature. The only righteousness acceptable to God is Christ's righteousness. Humans have many God given skills and abilities. We accomplish many things in the power of the flesh. But apart from Jesus it's impossible to do anything that is acceptable to God.

# A Confusing Gospel

The gospel is often presented as though it is a cure-all for every problem. “Come to Jesus, and He will solve all your problems.” So what do you do when Jesus tells us that there will be tribulation (John 16:33)? Or when James writes and says to count it all joy when various trials come your way (James 1:2)? Or when Peter encourages you not to think it strange when fiery trials happen to you (I Pet. 4:12)? Jesus doesn’t remove you from the problems, but He gives you the strength to endure as you learn to trust in Him.

Believing in Jesus does not make all your problems go away. The apostle Paul experienced many trials and tribulations after he believed. Five times he was flogged by the Jews. Three times he was beaten with rods. He was stoned once. He was shipwrecked three times. He was in the water for a whole day and night (II Cor. 11:24-25). God didn’t remove all his problems. If that is what a person believes about the gospel, he or she may be looking to Jesus for the wrong reason. They may miss the truth of the gospel by seeing Jesus as a problem solver and not as the Savior from sin.

You may hear other phrases like, “ask Jesus in your heart” and “give Jesus your heart”. These also fail to communicate the gospel. Which is it? Do I ask Him in my heart or do I give Him my heart? They are confusing expressions. What do those phrases mean to the hearer?

## **The Power of the Gospel**

The power of the gospel is in the understanding of the gospel; “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the *power of God* to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16, emphasis mine). [Jews refer to one ethnic group of people. Greeks or gentiles refer to everyone else.]

The word here for “power” is *‘dunamis’* in the Greek. It’s the same word translated as “meaning” in I Corinthians 14:11: “*Therefore if I do not know the ‘meaning’* of the language, I will be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me” (emphasis mine). The same word translated “power” is also translated as “meaning” in reference to language. There is power in understanding the meaning of the language. Since the gospel is expressed with language, it is essential that it is communicated accurately.

For example, in today’s world, many new things have to be assembled. How could you follow any directions if all you had were German instructions, not knowing that language? There would be no power in those directions for you. However, directions in your language give you all the power you need to follow the instructions. Understanding the gospel is the power of the gospel. Christian catch phrases do not communicate the truth. There’s no power in the message if it’s not understood.

Phrases like “ask Jesus in your heart” are not in the Bible. Some use Revelation 3:20 as an invitation: “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into Him and dine with him, and he with Me.” If the content of the gospel is explained, people can respond to the invitation by believing the gospel. But the context of this passage is to the Laodicea church. They needed to repent. Jesus rebuked them for having a contented attitude because of their wealth. Jesus was inviting them back to fellowship. It wasn’t an invitation to be saved from the penalty of sin [eternal condemnation].

An accurate presentation should include the following truths. Jesus is fully God and fully Man. God is holy. We are not. All of us are condemned sinners helpless to fix our situation. He is our sufficient Substitute. He died in our place. He rose from the grave proving He has power over sin and death. Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. If someone said to you, "Ask Jesus in your heart", the gospel has not been communicated. You could walk away believing you were on your way to heaven, when in reality you are still unsaved.

When individuals hear a convoluted message and fail to understand the gospel, they may have the assurance of heaven when they shouldn't. The responsibility of an evangelist is to point them to Christ as the only way and to do so Biblically. Then the decision is on the person to receive Him by faith or to continue in unbelief.

Is Jesus merely your problem solver? Have you asked Jesus in your heart? Or have you believed the gospel, by faith alone in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ?

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1. Does the message of the gospel promise to deliver you from all your problems? John 16:33; James 1:2
2. Do you have to ask Jesus into your heart for salvation? Do you have to give Him your heart? They are two opposite actions. What do those things mean? What does the Bible say? Acts 16:31; Romans 1:16
3. What is the gospel? I Corinthians 15:3, 4

Points to Ponder: The church has devised certain catch phrases like "ask Jesus into your heart". Those phrases do not communicate the truth of the gospel clearly. Other statements like "make Jesus Lord of your life" sound good, but it doesn't communicate the gospel either. For salvation to be effective it has to be understood. Believing the right gospel is the only gospel that has the power to save.

# The Frontloaded Gospel

Something + Jesus does not = Salvation

Be cautious of people who communicate the gospel. Often it's presented in a way that subtly adds work requirements to it. Some are well intentioned. Others are engrained in wrong theology.

Frequently in a gospel presentation you may hear someone say that a sinner must repent of all their sins. It infers that one must quit sinning. You may be asking yourself right now, "What's wrong with that?" And at first, I thought the same thing. But something began to bother me. Did "repent of your sins" mean I have to stop sinning? Is "repenting of sins" equal in meaning to acknowledging myself to be a condemned sinner? Have I turned from all my sins [repented]? Since I have been a Christian for over sixty years, most of my sins came after I got saved. Does this mean I am not saved? Are you beginning to see the problem?

## What Does the Word "Repentance" Mean?

The word "repentance" or "repent" in English does not carry with it the same meaning in Greek, the language of the New Testament. What do English-speaking people understand when you tell them to repent? I would say that most think it means to be sorry for something that one did, to stop doing some sort of bad behavior, or a combination of both. That's not necessarily a bad thing to do, but is that what the Bible says is necessary to be saved from the penalty of sin? No.

Dr. Renald Showers rightly states: John the Baptist (Luke 3:8) and Paul (Acts 26:20) indicate those who repent should do deeds appropriate to their repentance, but the change of conduct is the result and not the essence of repentance. In addition, Paul's statement that sorrow can prompt repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10) implies sorrow itself is not repentance. The essence of repentance is a genuine change of mind.<sup>3</sup>

There are two Greek words used in the New Testament for repent. The one used in most instances is, '*metanoia*'. It means to change one's mind.<sup>4</sup> In conversion, it is a significant change of thinking that affects what a person believes about how to be saved from the penalty of sin. A lost sinner must have a change of mind about what he or she believes about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Is Jesus and His work on the cross enough to save? Or must one first turn from their sins and feel sorry for them? Is Jesus necessary but not enough?

The first use of "repent" in the New Testament is in the book of Matthew. John the Baptist was preaching, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). The purpose of John's ministry was to prepare the way of the Lord (Matt. 3:3). The apostle Paul clarified John's message. He said John indeed "*baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him; that is on Jesus Christ*" (Acts 19:4, emphasis mine). John's baptism of repentance was pointing them to faith in Jesus as their Messiah Savior.

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<sup>3</sup> Renald Showers, "The Trouble with Lordship Salvation," presented in 1990 at Word of Life Annual Conference.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Bing, Gracelife.org, Grace Quotes on Repentance as a Change of Mind Notes 92, <https://gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=92&lang=eng>

The Jewish people believed they were in a right relationship with God because they were His chosen people. But John the Baptist told them, “Do not think to say to yourselves ‘we have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Matt. 3:9). In other words, John told that generation of Jews the necessity to change their mind, their belief. He told them that they were not “okay” with God simply because they were Jewish. He was saying to them that they needed a change of mind. They needed to change their minds from believing they were children of God by ethnicity to believing in Jesus by faith as their Messiah, their Savior from their sins.

### **Is the Phrase “Repent of Your Sins” in the Bible?**

The phrase “repent of your sins” is not in the Bible. Another friend and I shared this with a pastor at an outreach event. He immediately pulled out his Bible but after several minutes of searching, he realized it was not in there. Most people, including myself in the past, think the phrase is in the Bible. Most are surprised when they find out it is not. I know I was. So why is the phrase used?

### **Repenting of Sin is Works of Righteousness**

When one is incorrectly told to repent of their sins to receive salvation, he or she understands there is something one must do. They have to stop doing sinful things like drinking, smoking, cussing, etc. You don’t come as you are. You have to clean up your act. This is works of righteousness. Works of righteousness is trusting in one’s personal effort. It’s trusting in what you do. The Bible says that our righteousness is like filthy rags (Is. 64:6). How could our filthy rags-righteousness help save us?

According to the Bible we are not saved, “by works of righteousness which we have done” before faith or after one is saved (Titus 3:5). Abraham did not repent of all his sins. He “believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). Perfect righteousness comes from God, not from us. “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

The apostle Paul counted all things loss, including the righteousness from the law, that he “might gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:7- 9). The apostle repented [changed his mind]. He turned from his self-righteousness to trusting in Christ and His perfect righteousness. God demands perfection. The only perfect righteousness is found in Christ; “For God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:21).

### **Repenting of Sins vs. Admitting I am a Helpless Condemned Sinner**

Repenting of sins versus acknowledging that I am a condemned sinner helpless to fix my situation are two opposite actions. Repenting is something I must do. It is works of righteousness as already explained. I am hoping to gain God’s favor by changing my behavior. Admitting I am a condemned sinner helpless to fix my situation is something I believe God says about me. It is a faith response and not of works.

### **Believing vs. Doing**

The Jewish people followed Jesus across the sea to Capernaum and asked Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29). Man wants to do, but God says believe. Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi singing hymns when an earthquake opened the cell doors and freed the prisoners. The jailer was about to kill himself supposing the prisoners had fled. Paul stopped him. Then the jailer said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:30)? Man wants to do something, but God says believe. The apostle told him to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). Obviously the others in his home would have to believe, and they did. It was that straightforward.

Most people feel sorry for things they do because everyone has a conscience. Some change their behavior. They go to drug rehabs, or they quit smoking. This is reformation. It may be a good thing to do, but reformation cannot save anyone from the penalty of their sin, nor can it impart to them spiritual life. That’s not biblical repentance when it comes to being delivered from the penalty of sin.

No matter how old we are, we still deal with the principle of sin in our life that manifests itself in actions, whether in thoughts, words, deeds, or acts of omission. That’s because we still have an old nature. If repent meant to turn from all of our sins, why do we still sin?

### **A Different Gospel**

Cleaning up your life and doing things for Jesus will never get you into heaven. False teaching influenced the church of Galatia. False teachers perverted the gospel by teaching people that they had to also follow the law to be saved from the penalty of sin (Gal. 1:7). The apostle marveled that they were “turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6). Paul was so against that message that he told them, “if we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). In Galatians 1:8-9, the apostle declares most strongly that the gospel he preached was the one and only way of salvation, and to preach another was to nullify the death of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

### **Repentance in the Gospel of John**

The word ‘repent’ is not found in the entire gospel of John. This is significant because one of the purposes of the gospel of John was to lead people to salvation through Christ; “But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). John used the word “believe” many times throughout his gospel, but he never used the word “repent” even one time (John 3:15-16; 18; 36; 4:48, 53; 5:24; 6:29, 35, 40, 47; etc.). It is odd that if ‘repenting of sins’ was even part of the issue in justification [deliverance from the penalty of sin], that he would have used it along with believing and faith. This is probably due to the fact that a person who had believed in Jesus is one who had repented—one who had a change of mind about the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

### **Other Terminology for “Repenting of Your Sins”**

Repenting of sins is often couched in other terminology as well. Some will say “you need to turn from all your sin or to be willing to turn from your sins, or you need to feel sorry for your sins.” What if you didn’t feel sorry? What if you still sin? Have you turned from all of them? And if you haven’t turned from all your sin, did you honestly repent of them? Telling an unbeliever that he must

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<sup>5</sup> Vine, Complete Expository Dictionary, 141 [New Testament].

“repent of his sins” is simply making an agreement with God that he or she cannot keep. A sinner is promising God to stop sinning as a condition to receive forgiveness and eternal life. If the sinner is honest, he realizes not long after that his promise to stop sinning is a promise that he cannot keep. In essence, they are telling people to stop sinning, which is impossible. Have you stopped sinning? It’s a standard that no one can live up to.

### **Summary**

Repentance means “a change of mind.” Most people will point to their personal goodness, good works, and religious rituals to get to heaven. That’s our brokenness and makeup as humans. Such people need a change of mind. They need to stop trusting in themselves and trust Christ as their Savior.

When one tells an unbeliever to repent of their sins, they are telling them to stop the bad things they are doing. It implies that a lost sinner has to quit sinning so they can receive forgiveness from the Lord. It’s putting the cart before the horse. It’s telling an unbeliever they need to be sanctified to be justified.

This frontloaded message focuses you on yourself and not on Christ. It will trigger doubts about your salvation. Instead of looking at yourself, fix your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. He paid for all of your sins on the cross and has imputed His perfect righteousness to you the moment you trusted in Him alone (2 Cor. 5:21). When you do you have repented. You have changed your mind from trusting in your effort to trusting only in Christ and His work. Take God at His word. Then will you have assurance.

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1. There are two words in the New Testament for repent. The one used most often is the Greek word, ‘metanoia’. It means a change of mind. What did John the Baptist mean when he said, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand”? Acts 19:4
  2. To stop sinning is works of righteousness. Can works of righteousness save anyone? Titus 3:5
  3. How does God describe our righteousness? Isaiah 64:6; Philippians 3:8
  4. How do you receive perfect righteousness? II Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9; Romans 4:5
  5. Humans want to do something. What did the jailer ask? Acts 16:30
  6. How did the apostle answer him? Acts 16:31
  7. What does Paul say about someone who preaches another gospel? Galatians 1:8

**Points to Ponder:** Repenting when it comes to being saved from the penalty of sin is a change of mind. As a helpless sinner one must transfer his/her trust from themselves to the person and work of Christ. As a sinner I stop thinking that I am a good person; or that my religious activity can gain favor with God; or that my good behavior will make God accept me. Then I believe [place my confidence] in Jesus as the only way to God. His death on the cross paid my sin debt. His resurrection proves He has the power over sin and death.

In the end, it's not good people who go to heaven. It's bad people [sinners]. It's those who have repented; changed their mind from trusting in themselves, their personal goodness, and/or religion to trusting in Jesus Christ alone to save them from their sins.

# The Backloaded Gospel

Jesus + Something does not = Salvation

Another teaching to be aware of is the back loaded gospel. Like front loading the gospel back loading theology blends justification and sanctification truths. We have learned that justification occurs at the moment when a sinner believes the gospel. At that point in time, God declares the believing sinner righteous (II Cor. 5:21). The perfect righteousness of Christ is credited to him. You are justified by faith. Sanctification, however, is life-long. Although you have a position of being sanctified [positional] at the moment of faith, it is also to be lived out [practical sanctification] in this life by God's grace through faith as well.

Much of the New Testament is written to believers to exhort them to live a sanctified life, a life that is set apart to God. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (I Thess. 4:3). And Peter exhorted, "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (I Pet. 1:15). Practical sanctification is life long, and no one ever arrives entirely on this side of eternity.

You may hear a back loader of the gospel imply that justification guarantees sanctification. In other words, if you are saved, you will show it by your good works and righteous living. They will say a 'true' believer will persevere in faith to the end of life. But all this does is place the burden on you rather than learning to rest in and trust the Lord in the moments of time and the circumstances of life, "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Rather than living a life out of gratitude for Christ's sacrifice, it will cause you to live motivated by fear, doubt, and insecurity.

Once you are known by God in a relational way by believing in the gospel, you cannot lose your relationship. But back loading the gospel can make you question yourself and cause you to have little or no assurance, the very thing the Lord wants you to have. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so *that you may know you have eternal life*" (I John 5:13, emphasis mine). If you believed in Christ you can know you have eternal life.

Back loading subtly places the burden on you to be good enough to ensure you are truly saved. God wants us to do good works and to live righteously. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not" (Rom. 6:1-2)! But He doesn't require us to do these things to stay saved or to help save us from the penalty of sin. They should flow as a result of gratitude as one grows in the understanding of the magnitude of His love. As a believer, God doesn't demand you live righteously, but He desires you to do so out of love for Him, out of gratitude for what He has done for you.

His grace teaches us that "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12). Learning to do this takes time, understanding, effort, and desire. Before we are saved, we are bent on living a self-dependent life rather than a God-dependent life. That doesn't change overnight. It takes time to replace old thought patterns with Godly thoughts.

Good works and righteous living is the result of a growing believer. It's not a barometer of whether a person is saved or not. Many unbelievers live outwardly righteous and good lives. Jesus spoke of many who will call Him Lord proclaiming their works that they did: prophesying, casting out demons, and doing many wonders in His name. But He will respond to them, "I never knew you,

depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:21- 23). They did great and wonderful things in the name of Jesus, but they were denied entrance into His kingdom. Why? They trusted in their self-righteousness and religious works rather than in Him and His work on their behalf.

Back loading the gospel will never give you assurance. No one can define what it means to persevere in faith and good works till the day you die. For example, consider the following illustrations of a fictional guy named Bill. Let’s say he’s struggling with life. Nothing is going right for him. Because of his bad marriage and problems with his children, he begins to drink. At the same time, one of his coworkers has been witnessing to him about the Lord. So one day Bill is on his way to work, listening to a pastor on the radio sharing the salvation message. He understands his need. And at that moment, he believes in Christ to save him from his sin and to give him everlasting life. In the emotion and intensity of the moment, Bill is distracted and passes through a stop sign at a busy intersection. When he passes through the intersection, he is broadsided and killed. Did Bill go to heaven? A second scenario is that Bill gets saved that morning and begins to attend church once in a while. He starts to read the Bible but doesn’t grow much because he continues to struggle with family life issues. Six months later, traveling down the road, he’s distracted by his problems. As he passes through the intersection without stopping, he’s broadsided and killed. Did Bill go to heaven? A third scenario is that Bill gets saved on the way to work one morning while listening to a clear gospel presentation on the radio. He begins to attend church sporadically and tries to read his Bible. However, he is never able to give up his drinking habit, and his marriage ends in divorce. Distracted by all this, he quits going to church and stops reading his Bible. Six years down the road he is diagnosed with a terminal disease, likely because of his drinking over the years. Driving to work he is distracted in his mind over all his problems, passes through the intersection without stopping, and is killed. Did Bill go to heaven?

How you answer these three questions should give you an idea of how well you understand God’s grace. Bill believed the gospel and his assurance should have been in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Jesus paid for all of Bill’s sins on the cross. At the moment he believed, he received the forgiveness of sins, was restored to a relationship with God, was made fit for heaven with the perfect righteousness of Christ, and received everlasting life as a free gift. Bill’s good performance or bad performance, after he was saved, could never affect his eternal destination in heaven whether he died that day, six months later, or six years later.

But sin has consequences. Some of them can be severe. God has removed the penalty of sin for those who believe, but he does not remove the consequences of our actions. Bill’s way of life affected his fellowship with the Lord. He had no testimony. As a Christian he was dysfunctional, unfruitful, and unfaithful. He was completely controlled by the old nature. He entered into God’s presence prematurely.

Back loading the gospel message confuses and changes the gospel message. It motivates the sinner to change his or her behavior to get saved or to have assurance rather than believing the gospel. If you heard the gospel from a back loader, you could never be one hundred percent sure you are going to heaven. Will you remain faithful all of your life? What if you died in a period of unfaithfulness or disobedience? What does persevering to the end of life look like? How do you know you are persevering?

When one understands his helpless situation as a condemned sinner, then the only thing one needs to do is to believe, to rely on Christ alone for salvation. The moment you believe the gospel

God says you have everlasting life (John 3:16, 6:47). And everlasting life lasts forever. Believe His word, and you will have assurance. Trust in yourself, and you won't.

### **Baptism**

Others backload the gospel by adding religious rituals like baptism and communion, teaching that such things are necessary for salvation too. But those are works added on by man. Jesus commanded believers to be baptized and to partake in communion. Both are pictures of spiritual truth. Baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord (Rom. 6:3-5). In communion we are reminded of what Christ has done for us. We are proclaiming His death until He comes (I Cor. 11:24-26). But such things will not help get you into heaven.

Once I shared the gospel with a young woman at a fair ministry booth. After I finished, I asked her if she were sure she would go to heaven. She confidently said yes. That was pleasing to hear that a Christian was one hundred percent sure of heaven, I thought. Then just to be certain she understood the gospel, I asked her what she would say to God in order to let her in. [I'm sure entrance to heaven doesn't happen this way, but it helps to find out what a person is trusting in.] Without hesitation, she said she was baptized! When I delved a little deeper into her understanding, I found she went to a church in a denomination that teaches that you must be baptized to go to heaven. She had entirely missed the gospel message. Believers' baptism should be an act of obedience once a person is saved, but it's not a requirement to get to heaven.

The apostle Paul, the greatest disciple maker, thanked God that he had not baptized many of those in Corinth except for a few (I Cor. 1:14-16). That would be odd if he wanted to see them saved. He obviously knew that baptism was not a requirement for salvation. Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel (I Cor. 1:17). "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (v. 18). People get saved by hearing the message of the cross and believing in the person and work of Christ, not by being baptized. The thief on the cross was not baptized, but when he asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom, Jesus told him, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). We become children of God by faith in Jesus Christ alone, not by baptism (Gal. 3:26; John 1:12).

Causing one to look at his or her performance and/ or religious activities to determine salvation will only lead to a misplaced assurance or create doubt. If you are a believer, focusing on yourself and your behavior will frustrate you till the day you die. It's the very way that your old nature attempts to deceive you. Because when you take your eyes off Christ and put them on yourself, you have no power to live a faithful and functional life for the Lord.

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1. Will good works or religious activities help save you? Ephesians 2:8-10; Matthew 7:21-23
  2. What are believers called to? I Thessalonians 4:3; I Peter 1:15
  3. How is a lost person justified [declared righteous in the court room of God? Romans 3:21-26].
  4. If you understood and believed the gospel, can you know that you have eternal life? I John 5:13

5. Is water baptism necessary for deliverance from the penalty of sin? I Corinthians 1:14-18
6. Was the thief on the cross baptized? Luke 23:42-43
7. Can you tell the difference between an unbeliever and a believer by their outward behavior? Ephesians 4:22-24; 5:7-11; I Corinthians 3:3
8. Judas looked like he was on the team with the disciples. Did the disciples recognize that one of their own would betray Christ? John 13:21, 22

Points to Ponder: No amount of religious rituals or good works could ever take away our sins. Would a good judge let a car thief go free who promises not to steal any more cars? No, a good judge would sentence the car thief with an appropriate punishment. Good works or religious activities can never take away the wrongs you have done. Only Christ could through His death, burial, and resurrection.

# Two or Three Chairs Theology

Envision three chairs facing the congregation from the front of the church. Looking from the pews, the chair on the right represents an unbeliever. The chair in the middle represents a believer being controlled by the old nature, living a self-dependent life not a God dependent life. The Bible calls such a person carnal (I Corinthians 3:1, 3). The chair on the left represents a believer walking in the Spirit [the new nature], in fellowship [close communion] with God. Is that not what you see in Scripture—believers living spiritually, believers living badly, and unbelievers?

But front and back loaders do not have a middle chair in their theology. They only have two chairs: saved and unsaved. According to them all “true” believers will always return to faith and obedience. They base their theology on the faulty assumption that all “true” believers will persevere to the end of life in faith and obedience.

But perseverance in the faith is not automatic. For example, Peter exhorts believers to add to their faith perseverance to be useful and fruitful (II Pet. 1:6, 8). The writer to the Hebrew Christians tells them that they had need of endurance so they can do the will of God (Heb. 10:36). The reason Christians are instructed to persevere and endure is that the natural inclination is to give up, especially when things get tough. Perseverance is developed by learning to respond to the trials of life by faith in the Lord and His word (Rom. 5:3, 10:17).

A second reason these people have a two-chair theology is that some deny the power of the old nature in the believer or they deny that the believer still has an old nature. The Bible affirms that the old nature still resides in every child of God. It doesn't cease to exist nor does it improve. It is still deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). Back in chapter two we learned that when a person is born again, God gives him a new nature. But He doesn't remove the old nature. That's why the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus to put off the old man and to put on the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24).

If a believer could no longer be controlled by the old nature, there would be no struggle with sin. And if all you had were the new nature which is created in true righteousness and holiness, then it would be impossible to sin. You could not and would not sin. The new nature is incapable of sinning. Yet believers do sin like unbelievers because both have a sin nature and are capable of doing the same things.

An unbeliever only has the sin nature. But they can go to church for years. They can help out at the local soup kitchen and may give financially to good causes. They can even read the Bible and go on mission trips. On the other hand believers can live like unbelievers. A person of faith is still capable of committing the same kind of sin they did as an unbeliever. For example, King David had Uriah sent to the frontline in battle so that he would be killed to hide the fact that he had an adulterous relationship with Uriah's wife because she had become pregnant with the king's baby. And he didn't readily admit to his sin (II Sam. 11-12). How could David, a man after God's own heart do such a thing?

After David, his son Solomon became king and he built the temple of the Lord. The Lord spoke to him in a dream (I Kings 3:5-14). The Lord gave him his request of a wise and understanding heart.

Solomon prayed, “Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like you” (1 Kings 8:23). Solomon authored the books of Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and many Biblical proverbs. There should be no question that Solomon had a relationship with the Lord. So then when he became old, how could his wives turn his heart after other gods if there is no middle chair of carnality (1 Kings 11:3-4)? He certainly failed to persevere to the end of his life in faith and obedience. According to “two chairs” theology, he must have been a “professing” believer, not a “true” believer.

A third example is the man in the Corinthian church that had a sexual relationship with his father’s wife! Paul stated such a sin was not even named among the Gentiles (1 Cor. 5:1). The church had not dealt with it, and the apostle made it clear that it was a serious thing to overlook. He advised them that the church doesn’t judge those outside, but it was their duty to judge such sin committed by someone that was part of the church (1 Cor. 5:12). They were to administer Biblical discipline. Biblical discipline is for the purpose of correcting and restoring a brother or sister back to fellowship with God and with one another (Gal. 6:1). The church is not to discipline the unbeliever in the world. The church is to evangelize them. The point is that the apostle didn’t conclude the sinning brother was unsaved, but that he acted carnally and needed to be dealt with firmly as a believer. If there is no middle chair to sit in, then what do you conclude about him? He must be lost; an unbeliever.

Last of all, if the church doesn’t discipline its members, then God just might. He judged many in the Corinthian church. “For this reason, many of you are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [died]” (1 Cor. 11:30). Many died before their time—believers who went home early because of their carnality!

The middle chair is the position of carnality. Carnality is the state of a believer who is still immature in the faith when one should have grown up. The Corinthians were saved and by that time should have been spiritually mature. However, the apostle Paul identified them not as spiritual but as babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). They were carnal (1 Cor. 3:3). The old nature was controlling them. They failed to grow to any degree of spiritual maturity. As a result, there were arguments among them concerning silly things such as who baptized them (1:11). Living out of the resources of the old nature created envy, strife, and division among them (3:3). They brought lawsuits against one another (6:1). Some participated in immorality and idolatry (6:18, 10:14). Some were drunk when they partook of the Lord’s Supper (11:21). They were ignorant of spiritual things (12:1). In fact, in his second letter to the Corinthian church, the apostle Paul mourned for those who failed to be sanctified, “for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced” (II Cor. 12:21).

Every Christian has the potential to live carnally because we have a sin nature. But carnality will not dominate the maturing Christian’s life. He has learned to develop his relationship with the Lord so that his responses are more and more controlled through the influence of the Spirit of God through the word of God by faith. The maturing believer is learning not to let sin reign in his body, to obey it in its lust (Rom. 6:12). Growing spiritually takes time. It’s lived out in decisions day by day and moment by moment. When you fail to pursue your relationship with the Lord, it becomes easy to fall back into carnality.

In summary, many deny, ignore, or downplay the significance and power of the old nature. They have two-chair theology. This doctrine will make you wonder if you really are saved because you

struggle with sin. It keeps you from living a fruitful and abundant life. To deny that Christians cannot live carnally is to deny a large portion of Scripture. Much of the New Testament instructs believers not to live like the world. We are commanded to walk in the Spirit and to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (I John 2:15; Gal. 5:16; 2 Pet. 3:18). This can only happen as the child of God learns to surrender his will to God's through the power of the Holy Spirit by faith. This is the solution for the believer living carnally in the middle chair, not to deny the existence or the power of the old nature. [See Appendix 3]

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1. Is it natural for believers to persevere in faith and good works? II Peter 1:6-8; Hebrews 10:36; Titus 3:14
2. What's the difference between how humans see others and how God sees them? I Samuel 16:7
3. What causes great conflict in the life of a believer Galatians 5:17?
4. Can believers do the same sins as unbelievers? How does God describe David? Acts 13:22
5. What sin did he do? II Samuel 11:1-17
6. How should we live as believers? Ephesians 4:22-24. Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16, 25

Points to Ponder: You and I cannot live the Christian life in the power of the old nature. It takes God to be godly. The Christian life is lived moment by moment as I learn to surrender to the Spirit of God through the word of God by faith. Trials and tribulations are part of life experience. Those things are intended to draw you closer to God. But you have to be intentional in deepening and developing your relationship with Him. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

# Fellowship with God

The Bible uses the same words that describe human relationships as it does to describe believers in relationship with God. The believer is called a child of God and also referred to as little children (John 1:12; 1 John 2:1). The Lord said we would be called His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18). God is often referred to as our Father (Gal. 1:4, 4:6). These words strongly imply that believers are in a spiritual family relationship with the Lord. He is our Father. We are His children by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26).

There is a distinction between relationship and fellowship. Relationship speaks to my position as a child of God in justification and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Fellowship speaks to my condition as a child of God in sanctification when I am being led by the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> The Bible says we can know God relationally. Jesus prayed, “This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3, emphasis mine). Eternal life is not only a never-ending life, but it is also a quality of life that is defined by knowing God. It’s life that can begin to be experienced now in fellowship with God through the word of God by faith.

When you read and study the Word, you develop an understanding of God’s character. Transformation begins in your mind (Rom. 12:2). Old thoughts are being replaced by God’s word. His way of thinking is becoming your way of thinking. You are learning to trust in the Lord with all our heart and not to lean on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5). As this gradually happens you grow closer to Him just as you develop close personal relationships with people. It doesn’t happen overnight. It takes time and effort getting to know Him through His Word and learning to act upon it by faith.

You entered a relationship with Him the moment you trusted in Jesus as Savior. Then you should learn to grow, to know Him to greater and greater depths. This is fellowship or close personal intimacy. It’s learning to walk by faith, not by sight, trusting Him to direct and guide your path (Ps. 119:105). Paul’s prayer for the church at Ephesus was that they would be “strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” and that they “may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of God which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:16-19).

Because the Spirit of God lives in each and every believer, you can grow to know God to greater and greater depths. Paul’s prayer was that they would know the Lord in a deep and personal way. However, unconfessed sin and failure to walk in the light interrupts fellowship (1 John 1:6-9). Sin is anything you do in thought, word, or deed that God says is wrong. It can also be things that you do not do—sins of omission. You allow the world values to dictate life rather than the word of God.

For example, there are a lot of Christians that live together before marriage and engage in its intimacy, believing it is an acceptable lifestyle before God. But it isn’t. The Bible calls it fornication. It’s a serious sin. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus to “let it not be named among you, as is fitting

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<sup>6</sup> David R. Anderson, *Bewitched – The Rise of Neo-Galatianism*, (USA: Grace Theology Press, 2015), 105.

for the saints” (Eph. 5:3). A child of God cannot have fellowship while living such a lifestyle. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (I John 1:6). Fellowship can always be restored by confessing our sin and forsaking it. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

The context of the book of I John is fellowship of the believer with the Lord. Confessing your sin speaks of relational forgiveness. It’s similar to when you as a child had done something wrong. You lost fellowship temporarily with your mother or father until correction was made and you acknowledged you were wrong. Like God, a good parent administers discipline and fellowship is restored when correction is made (Heb. 12:5). You never lost the relationship though. You didn’t cease to be your parent’s child, but there became a breach in fellowship until confession and correction were made. And likewise, a child of God can never lose his or her relationship. However, a believer can lose their fellowship.

Unbelievers are not in a relationship with the Lord. It’s impossible for them to have fellowship. Fellowship can only be experienced by one who has come to know God by faith in Jesus Christ. First John is speaking to believers to acknowledge their sin and to walk in the light in order to be restored to fellowship (I John 1:6-7).

There are those who teach that a child of God can’t walk in darkness. Most agree that believers should walk in the light, but not all do. No one does one hundred percent of the time. Why would the apostle Paul write to the believers at Ephesus: “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them*” (Eph. 5:11, emphasis mine)? If a “genuine” believer walks habitually in the light, then why would Paul have to warn them not to have any fellowship with works of darkness? Why would he write to the believers in the church at Rome to, “*cast off the work of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy*” (Rom. 13:12-13, emphasis mine)? “Walking” describes a way of life, not just occasional sins. Why would they be told not to live in these sinful ways, if it were not possible for them to do so?

Instructing people that a “genuine” believer walks habitually in holiness and not in darkness almost guarantees they will fall short. It teaches believers to live a “have to” life rather than a “thank you” life.<sup>7</sup> Believers will be motivated to live to please God by good behavior driven by the flesh rather than by the Spirit. It sets up the believer for failure in living this life by faith. For without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

“Habitual” is a subjective term as well. What constitutes a habit? How many times do you have to sin before you are a habitual sinner? Is sinning once a day in thought, word, or deed habitual? If it is, we’re all in big trouble. What if you are an introspective person? Trying to determine if you have sinned habitually could drive such a one to the brink of insanity. Again these are teachings that compel you to look at yourself rather than looking to the Savior by faith.

Even the church at Corinth was called into fellowship with the Lord (I Cor. 1:9). They certainly had some ongoing issues with “habitual” sin. But their relationship didn’t depend on their walk. Their

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<sup>7</sup> David R. Anderson, *Bewitched – The Rise of Neo-Galatianism*, (USA: Grace Theology Press, 2015), 203.

fellowship did. They were saved, and they came into fellowship with God. They fell into some major sin issues, and they lost fellowship. There are consequences for living out of fellowship. Many of them were weak, many were sick, and many of them died early because God judged them (I Cor. 11:30). But their eternal destination was not affected. God's grace extends not only to the worst unbeliever, but it also extends to the worst sinning believer as well. How could it not?

As Christians we should put on "the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lust" (Rom. 13:14). But some folks paint an unrealistic picture of life as a Christian. "Genuine" believers do not always walk in holiness. We should, but we do not. When a believer walks in darkness, he or she does so because they choose to walk in the flesh and not in the Spirit. When you walk in the flesh you are not in fellowship with the Lord.

Fellowship is described a number of ways in Scripture. It is walking in the Spirit, entering His rest, abiding in Christ, walking in the light, and keeping His commands (Gal. 5:16; Heb. 4:10; 1 John 2:5-6; Eph. 5:8). When you are living out of the resources of the new nature, you cannot sin. It's not accomplished by self-effort. God has graciously given the believer a new nature in-dwelt by the Spirit of God. Only God can be godly. When you walk in the Spirit you have the power to live godly. But it requires surrendering to the Spirit by faith in those moments of time by depending on His help and strength. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

Remember the three chair illustration. When you are in fellowship you are sitting in the third chair. However, when you are not in fellowship, you have sat down on that middle chair. You are living carnally; living your way not God's way. As a child of God, you have not lost your salvation, but you have lost your fellowship. Nothing good can happen when you live out of the resources of the old nature.

[See Appendix 4]

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1. How does God describe our relationship with Him? John 1:12; Galatians 3:26
2. What's the difference between fellowship and relationship? [See 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph of this chapter]
3. Can a believer walk in darkness [live according to the old nature]? Ephesians 5:11
4. What's the context of the book of I John; fellowship or relationship? I John 1:3-9
5. How do you restore fellowship with the Lord? I John 1:6, 7, 9
6. Describe fellowship. Galatians 5:16; Hebrews. 4:10; I John 2:5-6; Eph. 5:8

Points to Ponder: Every person in the Bible had a struggle with sin. Disobedience kept a whole nation from entering the Promised Land for forty years, the place of rest for the people of God. Because we still have the old nature we have the potential to walk in darkness. We can never lose

our relationship with the Lord. Once we are His child we are always His child. But, through sin we can become a disobedient child and lose our close personal intimacy until confession is made and walking in darkness is forsaken. This is the ongoing daily struggle of every believer. For the Christian, continued repentance and returning to walking in the light is necessary to maintain fellowship.

# Everlasting Life: Reward or Gift

All who are justified by faith in Jesus enter His kingdom, but not all become faithful servants. There is potential reward or loss of reward for the believer. Going to heaven—in other words, everlasting life—is a gift (Rom. 6:23). It's not a reward. They are two distinct Biblical truths. And it makes a big difference if they are misunderstood.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, speaking to believers: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so through fire” (I Cor. 3:11-15). There is a judgment on the works of individual believers, which will have an impact on their future in the kingdom of God by receiving a reward or not receiving one. But loss of reward does not keep one from entering His kingdom.

“We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10). This refers to all believers, not unbelievers. Sin is not the issue. Sin has already been judged on the cross. The Lord Jesus by the grace of God “tasted death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). “He died for sin once for all” (Rom. 6:10). “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin” (Rom. 4:8).

Walking by faith after one is saved is not automatic. It takes spiritual understanding and the will to be intentional to grow as a believer. Building a relationship with God requires time and effort. It doesn't happen overnight. To learn to walk by faith, one must spend time in the Scriptures learning to apply those truths to one's life. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). It requires forsaking things to make time to be with God every day with the willingness to change to do life God's way rather than my way. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24). The context here is discipleship and reward: “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each one according to his works” (Matt. 16:27).

New believers often are not taught to study the Bible to mature in their relationship with God. Often they try to live the Christian life in the power of the old nature. They fail to become a functional and fruitful child of God. They end up going down the wrong road; failing to grow spiritually.

A couple of friends told an account of witnessing to a coworker. The fellow got saved. They bought him a Bible along with some other books to help him. He began to read and study. After a while he came to work one day, threw all his books down in front of them, and said, “I quit!” He meant he was done with pursuing the Christian faith. Why? Someone would say he probably was only a “professing” believer, that he was not a true convert. However, he likely became frustrated because of his lack of understanding of how to live the Christian life and just gave up. But this is precisely where God wants us. He wants us to give up trying and learn to simply trust in Him moment by moment, day by day.

The apostle Paul in his epistle to the Roman church after eleven chapters exhorted them: “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Why would he urge believers to dedicate themselves in such a way? If spiritual growth and dedication were automatic, he would not have to beseech them to do so. But it is not automatic so we must be intentional to grow as a believer.

In contrast to rewards everlasting life is a gift. It is received the moment one is saved from the penalty of sin by believing the gospel. One sees a number of examples in Scripture that people are saved immediately upon believing. At the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, about three thousand souls were added (Acts 2:41). Not long after this, Peter, with John, preached again and about five thousand men believed (Acts 4:4). Peter, through a vision, was directed to go to Cornelius and his family, and they believed the gospel and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They immediately received everlasting life, but their reward would vary depending upon the faithfulness of their walk with the Lord throughout their life.

Each person must make a personal choice to receive Him and His work to save them from the penalty of sin. The Bible warns those who reject Christ will appear before the Lord at the great white throne. They will be judged, each one according to his works and end up being cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death also understood to be eternal death, separation from the Lord for all eternity (Rev. 20:11-15). They end up there because they rejected God’s gracious offer of everlasting life by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

Everyone is born separated from God; born in the likeness of Adam. We are dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). In the Bible, death has the meaning of separation and is the absence of life; not physical life, but spiritual life. That’s why Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:3). He meant Nicodemus needed a spiritual birth to enter the kingdom of heaven. Otherwise, if one does not obtain spiritual life, he cannot enter. “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life” (I John 5:12). The only possibility then is the Lake of Fire, eternal death. That’s the only alternative for the spiritually dead. People don’t end up in the Lake of Fire because of their sin. They end up there because they have failed to receive the gift of everlasting life by faith in Jesus Christ.

Reward is completely distinct from the gift of everlasting life. Everlasting life is a gift given freely to whosoever believes in His Son. Reward or loss of reward is conferred at the judgment seat of Christ based on one’s faithfulness. The Lord told Abraham, “I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Gen. 15:1). Don’t live for the reward. Live for Him who gives the reward. Let God Himself be your motivation to live for Him. And then just rest in this truth: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25).

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1. Is everlasting life a gift or a reward? Romans 6:23
  2. Who receives everlasting life? John 3:16
  3. Who receives a reward? I Corinthians 3:11-15
  4. What are rewards based on? I Corinthians 3:12-14

5. Reward is a result of faithfulness. How does one grow in faith? Romans 10:17

Points to Ponder: We cannot earn God's favor. Eternal life is a gift. Rewards are received at the judgment seat of Christ. If you focus on getting a reward, you might be disappointed. Focus rather on your relationship with the Lord and He will treat you right. Good works are the natural outflow when one is walking in the Spirit. Those that give a drink and feed the "least of these" in the tribulation, unbeknownst to them are doing it to Jesus (Matt. 25:34-39). They were unaware that they were doing a good work. When we think we are doing a good work, it likely is from the wrong motivation.

# Saved by Grace

Back in Chapter Three, we saw the gospel is an offer to all; to “whosoever”. Man can do absolutely nothing to earn it. It is all of God’s provision for us. In our pride it’s difficult to believe there is nothing one needs to do to receive it and keep it. People find it hard to believe salvation from the penalty of sin is a gift that only needs to be received by faith alone in Christ alone. Adding to the pride issue, people have the wrong understanding of who God is as well. We may have a wrong fear of God. Fear of hell can be effective to help one see their need. But when one gets saved, some continue to carry that same mental image of this wrathful God who is going to send us there for misbehaving. This understanding of God has caused many to lack assurance.

To focus entirely on God’s love while ignoring His other attributes is also a mistake. Understanding how God’s character attributes like His holiness, love, justice, mercy, and grace, work together in complete harmony is difficult. We have a tendency to emphasize one and ignore the others. Some wrongly over accentuate His wrath, while others His love. But God says you can confidently “... rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:13).

Grace and truth are interwoven like a two strand rope. You can’t have the one without the other. Grace does not dismiss the other attributes of God. But grace is what we need to properly apply the truth in our lives and toward the lives of others. If we did not understand the truth that God is holy, it would be impossible to understand His grace. In His holiness God cannot accept man in His fallen state.

The holiness of God is man’s greatest problem. The Lord dwells in unapproachable light, who no man has seen or can see (I Tim. 6:16). Because He is holy, one “small” sin is an infinite offense to Him. So where does that leave us? If that were His only character trait, humanity would be doomed as doomed could be. But thankfully He is “gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy” (Ps. 145:8). If He were not, no one would have a chance.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed, God responded to them with mercy and grace. Mercy is not giving what they deserved. They didn’t physically die immediately. In His grace, He extended to them what they did not deserve. He didn’t leave them in their fallen condition. Instead it was undeserved favor on His part to go to them. He did because of His love for them (Rom. 5:8). By providing an innocent animal as a representative picture of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, God restored the relationship.

In their disobedience, they also had lost righteousness. The animal skins were pictures of the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to them. Because He is full of grace He provides a way back to Himself (I Pet. 3:18). That’s why the apostle Peter exhorted to, “rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:13).

Peter had the faith to get out of the boat but began to sink when he took his eyes off the Lord. He’s the one that made the great proclamation that Jesus is the Christ and then immediately opposed the plan of God. And he is the one famous for denying the Lord three times before the

rooster crowed. If anyone knew what the grace of our Lord was, Peter did. And he says to fix your hope fully on His grace, not on your works or your performance.

In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul wrote, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). Paul was not an advocate of universal salvation. In other words, he did not believe everyone is saved because of Christ. What he does illustrate is that God’s grace has extended undeserved favor to all people in that Christ’s death and resurrection has placed all humanity into a savable position. Anyone can believe the gospel and get saved.

The grace of God extends to everyone, including those who reject Him. Those who deny Him do not receive the benefit of the free gift of everlasting life. They end up in the Lake of Fire not because they had no Savior, but because they rejected the one and only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Inevitably, at this point someone will raise the question, “What about the native in some far away land that never heard the gospel?” Typically this is often a way to deflect the decision that the person you are talking with needs to make about Christ. But the question also implies that they believe God is limited. Dikkie Ekiai writes in his personal testimony in a tract, *From the Jungle to Jesus*, how he came into a relationship with the Lord while growing up in the jungle in Borneo.<sup>8</sup> His journey began by observing the symmetry of a spider web that he saw one day in the jungle. He responded to the revelation about God according to the book of Romans, “What may be known of God is manifest in them for God has shown it to them” (Rom. 1:19). He responded to the light of God through the revelation in creation. The Lord gave him more spiritual light and delivered him from the tribal witchcraft and shamanism that he grew up in. Eventually he heard the truth and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. He states, “I was far from God and lived much of my life in total ignorance of the Christian gospel, but the Lord was able to reach me.”<sup>9</sup> The grace of God can reach anyone anywhere.

Was not the Ethiopian eunuch saved similarly (Acts 8:26-38)? The Ethiopian had the word of God and was reading it when returning to Egypt. He did not understand what he was reading though. So God sent Philip to him, and he met the eunuch on his way home. Philip preached Jesus to him and the eunuch understood the Scripture spoke of Jesus Christ. He believed and was baptized immediately. Philip did not know the eunuch was searching for truth, but the Lord knew. So he sent Philip to him to give him understanding. The grace of God can reach anyone anywhere.

A friend of mine, who had been a missionary in Turkey, told me about a prisoner sitting in a cell reading the graffiti in a western Pennsylvania jail where he ministers. This man saw a small phrase etched on the wall, “Trust in God.” That small simple statement spurred him on to seek the truth about God. He told my friend that seeing that caused him to pray to God for the first time in his life. They had an hour and a half conversation about the Lord because of it. The grace of God can reach anyone anywhere.

Just think about what you are doing right now that the Lord might be preparing for you. I remember when the Lord had gotten my total attention. I had been reading and studying the Bible, little by little. It became a half hour a day; then an hour a day. Because of my job I could spend the

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<sup>8</sup> Dikkie Ekiai, *From the Jungle to Jesus at Peace with My Creator, Moments with the Book*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

whole morning day in and day out, reading, studying, and writing. Finally, it came to a head. The love of God compelled me to express to Him that I was willing to go wherever He wanted to send me and to do whatever He wanted me to do. And with fear and trepidation, I told Him that. Was I going to Africa as a missionary? Did he want me to go into pastoral ministry? I had no clue. We had two young sons and lived on two beautiful acres in western Pennsylvania in the house my grandfather built. I didn't want to leave. We had recently moved back home to be close to family and friends. What would happen next? I'll tell you what happened: nothing outwardly. I didn't move to another country, and I didn't change jobs. And I still live in the same house. God quietly began to use me right where I was. No thunder claps or lightning strikes.

God is looking for those who are available and are willing to be channels for His Word and His grace. By His grace, He prepared me for things that I had no clue that I would ever do. And by the way, He's never done with you until the day He calls you home. The grace of God can reach anyone anywhere. For you, it might be right in your own home.

### **Grace in the Old Testament**

Another good question that some will ask is, "What about those in the Old Testament? How were they saved?" They were saved the same way: by faith in the Messiah. They looked forward to the cross. We look back to the cross. I think they knew more than we give them credit for. Jesus referred to Abel as the first prophet (Luke 11:50-51). Abel, son of Adam, brought a more excellent sacrifice than his brother because it was a lamb from his flock (Heb. 11:4; Gen. 4:2, 4). He knew God required a blood sacrifice that was a picture of the Messiah to come. Abel's faith was not in the lamb, but in the future "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

All the prophets told of the suffering of Christ (Acts 3:18). The prophets said Christ would suffer and rise from the dead (Acts 26:22-23). They preached the same message from the beginning, pictured in the first sacrifice of the animal skins provided by the Lord and received by Adam and Eve. Job, the oldest book of the Bible, affirms the message; "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26). God communicated to them the truth of how man could be restored to the relationship with Him. Like today, some received the truth and accepted the gracious offer of God by faith, and others rejected it.

### **The Grace of God in Sanctification**

The grace of God not only saves us from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin as well. Peter warned, "Beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away by the error of the wicked, but grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:17-18). The grace that He extends to the world to save from the penalty of sin is instrumental in saving the believer from the power of sin; "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12).

Some get concerned that teaching God's grace will lead to unrighteousness. But the opposite is true. Believers being transformed by grace will lead to godliness. Grace is the presence and power of God teaching us to live righteously. Understanding the grace of God is transformative. Apart from His grace, there would be no hope to live the Christian life.

As believers, He has blessed us “with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 1:3, emphasis mine). We have a new identity and many undeserved spiritual blessings. These truths should transform your thinking about who you are in Christ:

1. We have everlasting life that begins at the moment of faith that can never be lost (I John 5:13).
2. We can know all of our sins have been forgiven (Col. 2:13).
3. We are a new creation (II Cor. 5:17).
4. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13).
5. Christ’s perfect righteousness is credited to us (II Cor. 5:21).
6. We are children of God (Gal. 3:26).
7. We can have fellowship with God (I Cor. 1:9).
8. We have purpose as part of His eternal plan (Rom. 8:28).
9. We have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).
10. We can have the peace of God (Phil. 4:7-9).
11. We are now citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20).
12. We have been brought near to God by the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:13).
13. We have been delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13).
14. We are partakers of the divine inheritance of the saints (Col. 1:12).
15. We have an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that does not fade away, reserved in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4).
16. His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).
17. We are partakers of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4).
18. We have the hope of a resurrected glorified body, incorruptible (I Cor. 15:42-44).
19. We are complete in Him (Col. 2:10).
20. We are partakers of the heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1).
21. We have been predestined to adoption as sons and daughters by Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph. 1:5).
22. We have the awesome privilege of being ambassadors for Christ and making disciples (II Cor. 5:20; Matt. 28:19).

On that list are just some of the many spiritual blessings found in His Word that we have as believers in Jesus Christ. In His grace, He sends His Spirit to convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He then by His grace saves from the penalty of sin those who by faith receive the free gift of everlasting life. By His grace, He regenerates us, adopts us, and indwells us with His Spirit to deliver us from the power of sin so that we can live a functional, fruitful, and faithful life that glorifies Him and is good for us.

By His grace we can know and have full assurance one day that we will also be saved from the very presence of sin! “Beloved now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (I John 3:2). Hallelujah! What a Savior! “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33).

- 
1. In what should you place your hope? I Peter 1:13
  2. How does the Bible describe the holiness of God? Exodus 33:20; I Timothy 6:16

3. How does the grace of God teach us to live? Titus 2:11, 12
4. How did God help the Ethiopian understand the gospel? Acts 8:26-38
5. What is one of the general ways God reveals Himself? Romans 1:19, 20
6. How did God extend grace to the people in the Old Testament? Acts 3:18
7. Who was the very first prophet? Luke 11:50, 51
8. Name some of the blessings you have in Christ.

Points to Ponder: God indwells believers with His Spirit and intends to work in you and through you. He created the church to be His representatives on earth. We have a number of blessings in Christ. We did nothing to deserve these incredible blessings. Understanding God's grace should motivate us with a heart of gratitude. It should create a desire to serve Him with gladness (Psalm 100:1). Are you available to faithfully serve Him? How is He intending to use you as one of His ambassadors?

# Perseverance and Good Works

The Christian life is not a sprint. It's a marathon. It requires perseverance.

In many of his epistles to the churches, the apostle Paul writes knowing there is the possibility that they could fail to persevere. Specifically, he was concerned about them being deceived into believing false doctrines or experiencing tribulation that would lead them away from the faith. To the church at Thessalonica, he wrote, "For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you and our labor might be in vain" (1 Thess. 3:5). They began as followers of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:6). But, the apostle had concerns the disciple-making ministry that he had begun with them might have been in vain if they had abandoned the faith. He sent to them to see if they had continued in their faith in Christ. He was concerned about their sanctification, not their justification.

To the believers at Galatia, he was concerned because they were bewitched and turning away from the one who called them to a different gospel (1:6). His concern for them is expressed in chapter four verse nine: "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?" They were believers on the brink of going in the wrong direction and not persevering in faith in Christ.

To the church at Ephesus, he equipped the saints so they would not be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (4:14). The devil and his forces target believers through deceit to make us dysfunctional and unfruitful as children of God.

And one last example is Paul's first letter to Timothy. "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, *for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness*, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows..." (I Tim. 6:8-10, emphasis mine). Riches can distract believers so that they stop following Christ. He wrote to caution Timothy, a believer, of such temptation: "But you, O man of God, flee these things" (I Tim. 6:11).

It's evident from many passages of Scripture that not all persevere to the end of life in faith. The apostle, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, exhorted them to remain faithful in spite of the false teachings and tribulations that came their way. Failing to persevere in faith can bring significant consequences. You may lose reward at the judgment seat of Christ. You may lack assurance of heaven. Most importantly you lose fellowship with God. However, it doesn't cause a loss of salvation. God remains faithful even when we fail (II Tim. 2:13).

Following are explanations of a few verses that are often taken out of their proper context.

## **Matthew 7:16 "You will know them by their fruits".**

This verse is often used to identify a Christian. It's taught that you can look at someone's behavior and determine whether a person is saved or not.

But the context of this verse has to do with false prophets (Matt. 7:15). "Fruits" is a reference to what they teach (Luke 6:43-45). They are the ones who prophesied, believing they will enter the kingdom based on their 'good' works and religious activities (Matt. 7:20). But Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you". They fail to enter by the narrow way, through faith in Christ. They obviously taught the same thing to others; "For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

#### **Understanding II Corinthians 13:5 "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith."**

Are you supposed to look at how well you are living to determine if you are a "true" believer? How many times do you have to examine yourself to conclude you are indeed in the kingdom? Could you know for sure by looking at your good behavior?

The Corinthian church questioned the proof of Christ speaking through the apostle Paul (II Cor. 13:3). In the three chapters before this, he is defending his apostleship (10-12). He appeals to the signs of a true apostle that were accomplished among them, "in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (II Cor. 12:12). The apostle affirms the sincerity of their salvation by addressing them as saints (II Cor. 1:2). However, they questioned his authority to speak on behalf of Christ: "since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me" (II Cor. 13:3). He tells them to examine themselves to see whether they were in the faith. If they answer yes, then they are the proof that Christ is speaking in the apostle, because Christ saved them through Paul's ministry of the gospel (Acts 18:1-11).

In other words, the apostle expected them to respond positively that they were in the faith. Thus, ironically by affirming they were saved, they were also affirming the truth and proof that Christ was speaking through the apostle Paul. This verse has nothing to do with looking at your performance to determine if you are saved.

#### **Understanding Matthew 24:13 "But he who endures to the end shall be saved."**

Some use this verse to proclaim that "true" believers will endure to the end. Again, context must be king. This passage is speaking to the future tribulation, the end of the age (Matt. 24:3, 6). Jesus is speaking to Jewish disciples about the future kingdom, in regards to the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. The Old Testament makes it evident that the Lord saves Jerusalem and Israel from total annihilation (Zech. 12:2-9, 14:4; Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 30:7). Those who endure this horrible time to the end of the tribulation will have their physical life saved and enter into the millennial kingdom, the thousand year reign of Christ on Earth (Rev. 20:2-6). Nine verses later, Jesus makes it clear that "unless those days were shortened no flesh would be saved" (Matt. 24:22). Again this is a reference to the inevitable fact that no one would survive physically if those days were not shortened. It's not speaking to enduring to be saved from the penalty of sin.

#### **Understanding I John 2:19 "They went out from us, but they were not of us"**

The apostle John was writing to a group of believers concerning those who were trying to deceive them (I John 2:26). John is warning them about many antichrists in the world (I John 2:19). These antichrists denied that Jesus is the Christ (I John 2:22). They departed from John and his companions. Is this verse teaching that anyone who drifts away from going to church or from truth is unsaved? Is this teaching that these didn't persevere? No. It is teaching that those who departed were unsaved, because they rejected the truth that Jesus is the Christ, not because they didn't persevere in faith. They needed to be wary of those who teach such heresy. To see this as

“professing” believers who prove they are not “true” believers by not persevering is reading that into this verse.

A person doesn’t have to persevere to the end of life to get saved from sin’s penalty. But one does have to persevere to be delivered from the power of sin; the everyday struggles that come our way as a child of God. Remember you have two natures. Be careful. Your old nature can keep you from persevering in the moments of time and circumstances of life, so that you never grow to maturity and you never bear any fruit (II Peter 1:5-9; Matt. 13:21, 22).

#### **Understanding I Timothy 1:19 “concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck”**

If one is not careful, you can shipwreck your faith. In Paul’s first epistle to Timothy, he wrote about two men who fell away: “*concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck* of whom Hymenaeus and Alexander, who I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:18-20, emphasis mine). To suffer shipwreck, you have to be on the ship. So what did the apostle do? He treated them as brothers in Christ and brought disciplinary action so that they would learn not to blaspheme. He had instructed the church at Corinth not to judge those outside the church because God will judge them. They were to judge those inside: “anyone named a brother” (1 Cor. 5:11-13). That is what the apostle did in this case.

All believers are susceptible to falling away. Drifting and departing from the faith can happen. It doesn’t “un-save” you. It simply causes one to be useless as a child of God. You choose to serve your own interests and desires. Your life fails to glorify God. It’s not the life God created for us.

#### **James 2:17 “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”**

For some this is the acid test to tell if someone is a genuine believer if you have works. Some will quote John Calvin who supposedly wrote, “We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.” But the Bible makes it evident that a person can be saved apart from having done any works (I Corinthians 3:13-15). The thief on the cross is an example (Luke 23:42).

The modern-day study Bible has become popular for the average person in the pew. But commentaries are written by man. For example, when it comes to this verse in James, I researched thirty-two commentaries and study Bibles. Twenty-seven of them taught that this verse in James shows that works are proof of salvation; that if there are no works, there is no salvation. Two of the commentaries were at best confusing. And only three said it spoke to believers who did not express their faith in good works.

The King James Version states that faith is “alone.” In other words, it doesn’t say faith does not exist. In the example used in James, it’s by itself having no works because the believer doesn’t respond by helping another brother in physical need. If something is “alone”, it must still exist.

People err when using words like “saving” faith. Such terms can describe the difference between justification and sanctification [walking by faith]. But, those who use “saving” faith here imply there is another type of faith that doesn’t save. The Bible uses words to describe faith like: “little” faith, “great” faith, “full” of faith, “no” faith, and a faith that is “dead.” It never uses the combination “saving faith.” A saved person initially exercised faith. An unsaved person never exercised faith. A faith that doesn’t save is unbelief.

James was writing to people saved from the penalty of sin. But they were not being delivered from the power of sin. They were not walking by faith. They had a relationship with God, but they were out of fellowship with Him. They were living carnally, similar to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 3:1-4).

The word for dead, '*nekros*', does not mean false or non-existent. In Revelation 3:1, it refers to a church that is inactive and barren: "but you are dead." It means useless, inactive. In the Bible, physical death refers to the separation of the soul from the body. James aptly compares faith that is dead to a body that is dead (James 2:26). A body that is dead still exists as a body, but it is separated from the soul. It ceases to perform its intended function. A dead body becomes useless, of no profit. Likewise, faith is useless [dead metaphorically] when it produces no works. As believers they were not doers of the word, only hearing it, thus deceiving themselves (James 1:22).

The book of James explains that this kind of response does not profit the person in need which is the purpose of good works. Paul writes to Titus to encourage good works, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should *be careful to maintain good works*. These things are good and profitable to men" (Titus 3:8, emphasis mine). Good works are not necessarily a natural response of those who have been saved from the penalty of sin. All believers need to learn to maintain good works. We should be fruitful. But the old nature can control you, causing you to be unfruitful.

#### **Good Works are not Automatic**

We are created in Christ Jesus for good works that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). The richer brethren were exhorted to be rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:18). Believers should be careful to maintain good works (Titus 3:8). This is something they must learn to do (Titus 3:14). Sometimes it requires others to motivate us; "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). An unbeliever has no potential to do good works that are pleasing to God.

- Good works result when a believer abides in Christ, being controlled by the Spirit of God through the Word of God (Rom. 8:6; Gal. 5:16).
- Only the Lord can see the purpose of the heart. He knows the difference between works prompted by the flesh and ones motivated by the Spirit. "...And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13).
- "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). There is the possibility that a saved person's works can be burned if the works are not built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

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1. Was Paul concerned about believers continuing in the faith? I Thessalonians 3:5; I Timothy 6:8-11
  2. Who was the Bible speaking about when it says "You will know them by their fruits"? Matthew 7:15
  3. The book of James is written to believers. He calls them brethren 15 times. What did it mean that they were dead? James 1:22

4. Are good works automatic in the life of a believer? | Timothy 6:18; Titus 3:8, 14; Hebrews 10:24

Points to Ponder: Tribulation can pressure believers to give up. But these are designed to help us grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Obstacles should cause us to depend on the Lord. But if we're not careful, they can also drive us in the opposite direction. A Christian walk can be all over the map. A consistent faith requires perseverance. Perseverance does not come naturally. In those moments when you want to give up, "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

# In Conclusion

The gospel is the most important message that God has given us. It is an uncomplicated message of how one can be restored to a relationship with God. But it gets muddled because of the way it is communicated. Often it is conveyed in a way that leads to doubt and fear, rather than assurance. Just because a person can lack perseverance or falls away doesn't mean they were never saved to begin with. The possibility is always that one may not have understood the gospel and isn't saved. He or she may have thought walking an aisle, repenting of their sins, getting baptized, saying a prayer, or asking Jesus in their heart saved them. They may have placed their faith in something they did, rather than in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Or they may be blending justification and sanctification truths. So it is certainly wise to attempt to see what a person is trusting in.

However, on the other hand, we cannot assume one is unsaved because he or she is not persevering or has fallen away from the faith. For those who fall into serious sin, that is the purpose for church discipline, to restore them back to fellowship with the Lord. Why would the church, believers, be instructed to administer discipline, if a believer did not have the potential to commit serious sin? A child of God does not always respond appropriately to discipline. Sometimes they don't want to change. Such ones may never attend church again and may continue in their particular sinful practice. Do we then write them off as "professing" believers and not "true" believers, even if they understood the gospel and professed personal faith in Christ? I don't think God writes them off and we shouldn't either.

Believers who walk in darkness are still believers. They are out of fellowship with Him (1 John 1:6). They have sat down in the middle chair, living carnally. The power of the sin nature can still control a believer. They can even be in a church and have actually fallen away from the faith, failing to persevere. They don't have to quit going to church to fall away. The church at Laodicea is an example (Rev. 3:14- 20). Jesus was outside the church knocking, asking anyone in the church to invite Him in. If one did, he would come in and have a meal with him. Eating together in the Bible is a picture of fellowship. The church was in a relationship with the Lord, but they were out of fellowship with Him. They thought they were wealthy and needed nothing. But Jesus told them that they were "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:20). They had fallen out of fellowship with the Lord while participating in church! They were walking in darkness, not in the light.

Major failure in faithfulness may cause significant consequences. But getting to heaven, being delivered from the penalty of sin is not dependent upon you. It depends on the faithfulness and promise of God (II Tim. 2:13).

The purpose of the church is to preach the gospel and make disciples. We are in relationship with one another united by the Spirit of God in Christ to accomplish His ministry. If you are faithful to your calling, then you will experience deliverance from the power of sin and bear fruit for God. You will become the functional and fruitful person that God intended for you to be. This should be the desire of every individual in the body of Christ. That's why grasping these truths from the Bible helps you and me to understand our position and condition. And the better that one understands his or her position in Christ—that you are declared righteous, a child of God, unable to save yourself from

sin's penalty, power, and presence—the more likely you will respond positively to His grace and Lordship over your life. You will desire to live His way not because you have to, but because you want to.

Some dangle the possibility of hell over the head of a carnal believer to get them to straighten up. Doing that may even keep others in line so that their outward behavior is consistent with the standards of the law. That's what law does. It scares people or motivates people out of fear of penalty. It changes the person outwardly, but not inwardly. There's no transformation in that. Grace motivates people out of love for what the Lord has done. When you learn to cooperate with the Spirit of God, He begins to change you from the inside out. The Spirit shows you that nothing good dwells in you; that apart from Christ you can do nothing for God; that you can't live the Christian life; that it takes God to be godly. The Spirit reveals these truths to help you grow in your relationship with Him (Rom. 7:18; John 15:5; Gal. 2:20). The old nature can never produce anything godly. Only the new nature can because it was created in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24).

Your position in Christ can never change regardless of your actions. Assurance of heaven could never be achieved by looking at one's performance. Teaching that all "true" believers will persevere in faith, good works, and holiness, is misleading. God wants you to persevere, not grow weary, and not lose heart. Living faithfully requires perseverance, depending on the Spirit of God for the power. That's what we should do. But teaching that you must persevere, only makes you examine your outward behavior rather than looking to Jesus by faith. You can never live up to the perfection that the Lord requires. Judging your salvation based on good or bad behavior creates doubt or self-righteousness. It will never give one hundred percent assurance. Assurance and living faithfully depends on taking God at His word, trusting in the promises and faithfulness of God. It made a world of difference for me. It can for you too.

# What Should I Do?

Once you are saved from the penalty of sin, you are born again. You have spiritual life and have been restored to a relationship with God. The Spirit of God indwells you to empower you to live the Christian life. When we trust the Lord and His word, He gives us grace to deal with whatever comes our way. Grace is His undeserved power and presence that enables us to live an abundant life above and beyond the circumstances.

Grow as His disciple. Learn to walk in the Spirit by faith understanding that life as a believer is a marathon, not a sprint. Being saved from the penalty of sin is the beginning of the race [Justification]. When you believed the gospel, you have everlasting life. And everlasting life is forever. You are accepted in the Beloved [Jesus] (Ephesians 1:6, 7). Full assurance is the first important step of faith. Trust is significant in any friendship. Trust Him completely when He says, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47). Then begin to walk by faith according to His word, learning to surrender to Him moment by moment day by day. As you do, the Spirit of God will begin to transform you into the image of His Son (II Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29).

Beware of spiritual warfare! In sanctification the flesh [old nature] has desires that oppose the Spirit of God to entice you do things that you do not want to do (Gal. 5:17). Your old nature influenced by the world system tempts you to sin. Sin disrupts your fellowship with God and makes you dysfunctional as His child. However, when we confess our sins as believers and return to walking in the Spirit, He restores the fellowship (I John 1:7-9).

The world system opposes the kingdom of God. In sanctification you maneuver in the world by putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-19). His armor is truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, and prayer. The Spirit of God will use this combination throughout your life to encounter the opposing forces. But you have to do one thing. By faith you have to put on the armor for it to be effective.

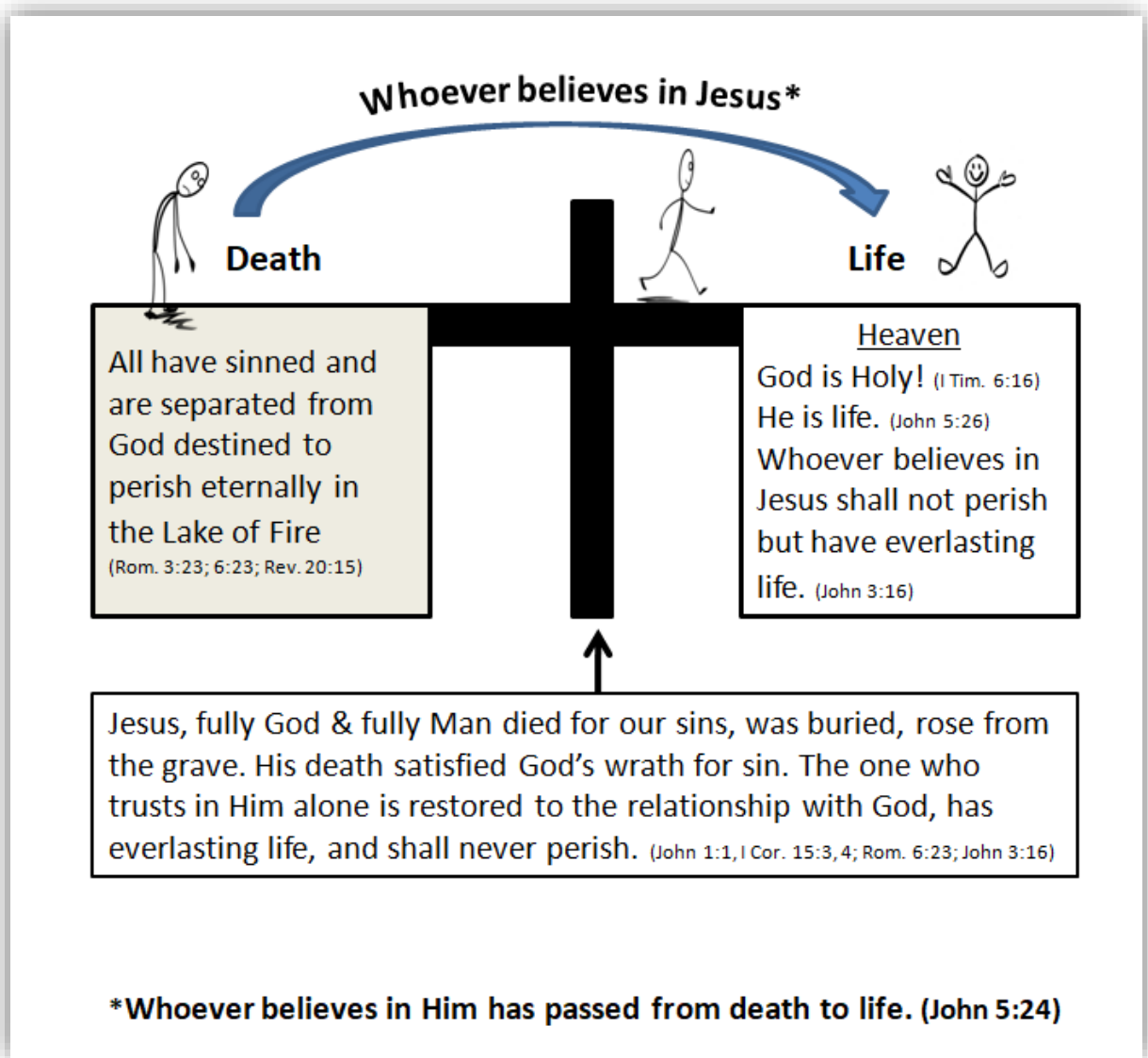
Lastly, God doesn't want you to be a lone ranger. God will use other believers to encourage you. It can be difficult to find a Bible believing church to help you "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18). That's why assurance is so important. Any teaching that does not give assurance of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone is another gospel. We should do good works. But the performance of good works, the promise of good works, or the evidence of good works does not prove a person has eternal life. Faith in the Person and work of Christ is the only way of having assurance. Evaluate a church by what it teaches from the Bible and how the people interact with one another. Be patient and pray for God's direction. It may be worth driving a distance to a church that accurately teaches and demonstrates the grace of God.

The Holy Spirit uses the Bible, prayer, and fellowship with other faithful believers to influence you to grow spiritually. As you learn to abide in Him, His grace will enable you to become a functional, fruitful, and faithful child of God (Galatians 5:16, 22).

You can read more about God's grace and growing as a believer at my blog site:  
[Assuranceofheaven.com](http://Assuranceofheaven.com)

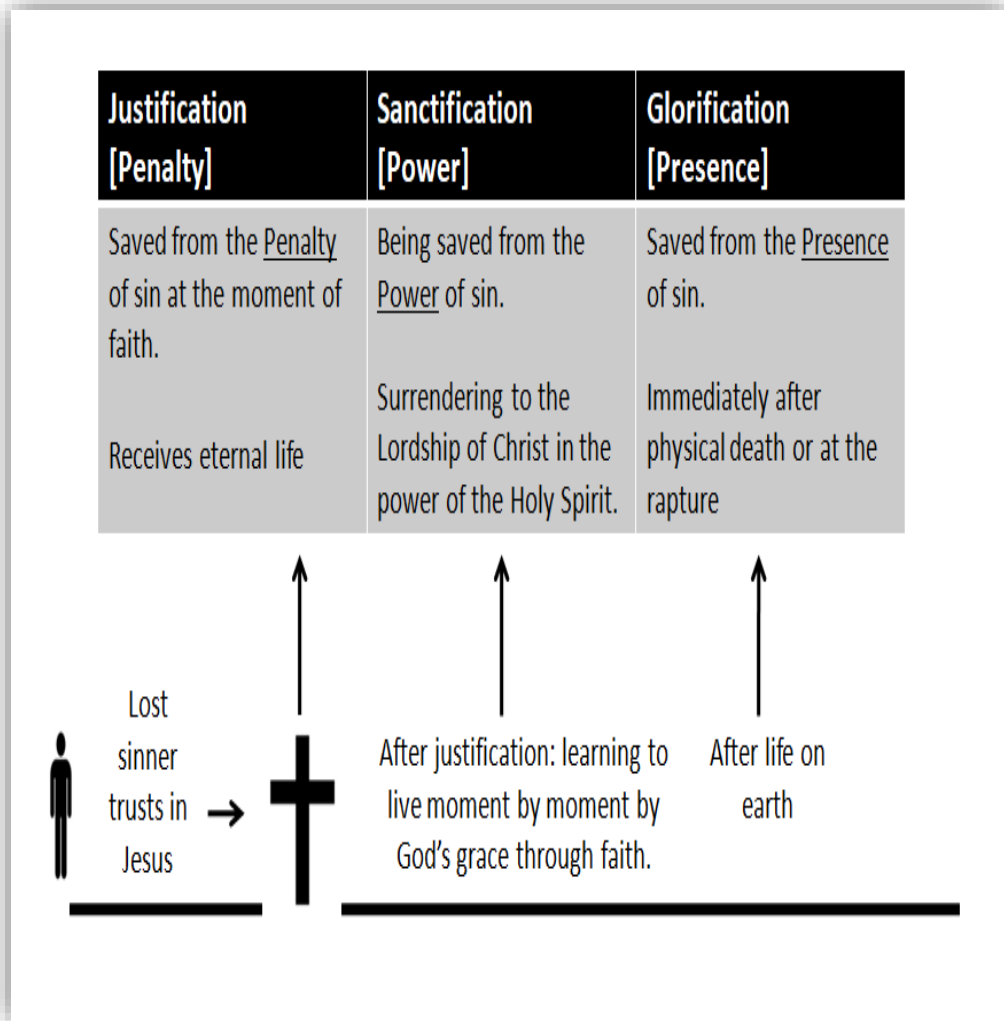
# Appendix 1

## Salvation from the Penalty of Sin [Justification]



# Appendix 2

## The Three Tenses of Salvation



# Appendix 3

## Believer's Two Natures

**The Problem: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." (Gal. 5:17)**

### New Nature

**Christ in you  
Walks in the Spirit  
Bears spiritual fruit  
In fellowship with God  
Keeps Christ's commands  
Serves God  
Cannot sin**  
(1 John 1:3, 3:9, 24; Col. 1:27; Rom 7:4, 6;  
Gal. 5:16)

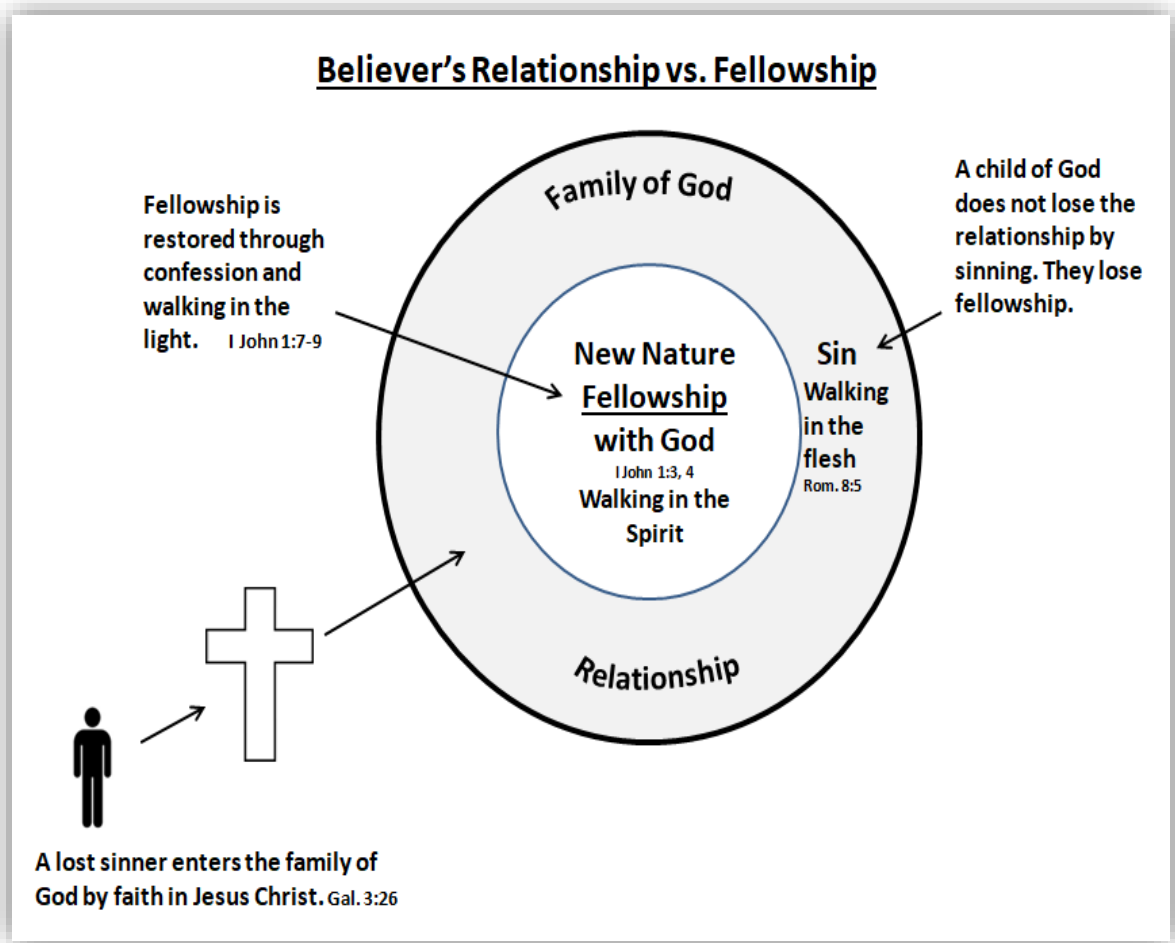
**Solution: Walk in the Spirit,  
and you shall not fulfill the lust  
of the flesh. Gal. 5:16**

### Old Nature

**Deceitful  
Wicked  
Carnal  
Cannot please God  
Behaves like unbelieving  
Not in fellowship with God  
Brings forth death**  
(Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:14, 18; 8:6, 8; Gal. 5:17; I  
Cor. 3:3)

**"For I know that in me (that is,  
in my flesh) nothing good  
dwells." Rom. 7:18**

# Appendix 4



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