

Scriptural Assurance of Salvation

MY SEARCH FOR PEACE WITH GOD

There was an old man in India who had his family carry him to a particular spot each sunrise where he would watch the sun until it set. He did this until he was blind. He wanted to appease God's wrath.

My search for peace with God was not as dramatic, but it was as real. I would kneel for hours in prayer and afterwards would sense only a deeper alienation between myself and God. I tried fasting. I would confess my sins and yet still, no peace. I started reading some books by a renowned preacher who supposedly had thousands of lives changed by his ministry, and somehow I knew his formula was no different than what I had heard for years. I knew there had to be a key I had overlooked, so I started studying the Bible.

It was after I had already read the Bible through once and was reading the New Testament a second time that I saw something I had never heard in my life. I was reading in the Gospel of John when the words of Christ came alive. I read, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he who believes on Me has everlasting life."

I saw two things in that verse which contradicted my so-called Christian beliefs. First of all, heaven is conditioned upon believing in Christ – not keeping the commandments, water baptism, living a good life, etc. Second of all, a person can have the assurance right now that he will go to heaven.

I had always known that Jesus Christ died for my sins, but I had never understood exactly what significance that had in getting me to heaven.

When Jesus was on the cross He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). Imagine, God the Son was forsaken for the first time in all eternity by God the Father! Why? Hebrews 2:9 explains, "But we see Jesus, Who was made lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Jesus Christ literally suffered the agony of hell on the cross. He took the punishment each one of us deserves for our sins. Christ accomplished in those few hours on the cross what it would take us an eternity to do – He paid for all of our sins.

Do you understand the impact of this? Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to get a person to heaven; therefore, the way a person lives has absolutely nothing to do with it. Christ said, “he who believes on Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47).

When I understood the Gospel, I clearly saw the issue involved, which is human effort versus God’s grace. The reason I did was because of my religious background where it had been pounded into my head that a person had to work his way to heaven.

It is sad but true that there are many who think they have understood the issue, but in reality, have not. It is because of this that I try to reason with people to put their understanding of the Gospel under the scrutiny of the Word of God.

One major reason there is so much confusion in this area is that many people have been conditioned into taking Christianity out of the realm of reason. A good example of this is a well-known evangelist, who, when he was explaining his ideas, said something to the effect, “If you are trying to understand this intellectually, you might as well forget it. You have to put aside intellect and take it by faith.”

The purpose behind his appeal to put aside reason was rather obvious. At one point he quoted scriptures which stated that a person is saved through faith and nothing he can do of himself, since Jesus Christ’s payment was sufficient. And in the next breath, without referring to any scriptures, since none exist, he said a person had to forsake sin and follow Christ. So in reality, he was telling people that heaven is a gift and a reward at the same time, which is intellectual insanity.

The God of the Bible, however, appeals to man’s reasoning abilities: “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord...” (Isaiah 1:18).

If I were to approach you on your birthday with a gift, and before you had a chance to open it, ask for ten dollars, would it really be a gift? I could say that it was a gift, but that would not make it a gift. So it is with many people’s understanding of the Gospel. They often say that they know they can do nothing to earn or deserve heaven; yet, they believe they still must do something and this “something” somehow doesn’t come under the category of works because they call heaven a gift.

I want to thoroughly go through these “somethings” that no longer make the Gospel the Gospel and show how they are in direct opposition to the Word of God.

IS AN EXPERIENCE A CRITERION FOR TRUTH?

Many people believe they are going to heaven because they have had an experience. I plead with those people to lay aside any experience they may have had and to look only at Scripture to determine whether they truly are saved. If God, Himself, puts His Word above His Name (Psalm 138:2), then certainly a person should be willing to put His Word above any experience.

How do you really know whether something is true or not? Why do you believe there was an actual person named Christopher Columbus and reject the existence of the tooth fairy? Of course, your answer would be that one is substantiated by history and the other is not. And why do you accept Christianity above any other religion? I hope your answer would be that the Bible alone has prophecies which have been perfectly fulfilled.

What it comes down to, therefore, is that what you believe to be true is open to verification and confirmation. In fact, this is what makes Christianity unique. God has worked in history so that Christianity alone is open to investigation to prove its authenticity. There are 333 facts concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ recorded in the Old Testament, which was completed 400 years before He was born. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was referred to thousands of times outside of the Bible before 150 A.D. and would stand up in any court of law. Also, archaeology, a relatively new science, has only confirmed the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Even more basic, why do you believe that Jesus Christ is God instead of a created being? Why do you believe in a literal hell? Your answer would go back to the teachings of the Word of God. Since the Bible was written so that you can know what to believe, does it seem reasonable that when it comes down to the most important thing, your eternal destiny, that you should fall back on some experience you have had rather than the clear teachings of the Scripture? Nowhere in Scripture does it speak of such an experience, yet over one hundred and fifty times it is stated that going to heaven is conditioned upon believing in Christ alone. First John 5:13 says,

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the Name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life.”

It is clear that the basis intended by God for people to know they have eternal life is the never-changing Word of God rather than the ever-changing human disposition.

IS SALVATION CONDITIONED UPON ASKING?

Many times, when I’ve been talking to people about how to go to heaven, they reply, “Oh, I already know I’m going to heaven; I’m saved.” When I question them about what they mean by “saved,” they often reply that they have gone forward in a church or that they have asked Christ to come into their heart. I then must explain that what they mean by “saved” and what the Bible means are two different things. Salvation is received by faith. Nowhere in Scripture does it say we receive Christ by personal invitation. The only way we receive Christ is by believing on Him. John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power” (the right) “to become the sons of God; even” (specifically) “to them that believe on His Name.”

Please note that this verse doesn’t mention anything about asking Him into your heart or praying for Him to save you, but rather says only to believe on His Name.

The Name “Jesus” is very significant. It literally means “God Who Saves” in the Hebrew. If a person thinks that in any way he has some part in getting himself to heaven, then he is not relying on Jesus Christ to save him.

Think of it this way. If you were drowning ten miles from shore and someone were to pull you half-way in and left the rest up to you, could you say that person had helped you or saved you? What if that person were to pull you fifteen feet away from shore? It is true he would have helped you more than if he had left you five miles from shore, but as long as he left you your part to do, regardless of how small, he didn’t save you. So whether a person thought he had a big part to do in getting himself to heaven, like keeping the Ten Commandments, or a small part, like asking Christ into his heart, it comes down to the same thing – that person is not believing in Jesus Christ to be his Savior.

Scripture is very clear on this point. Ephesians 2:8,9 say, “For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Now you might think when someone says to ask Christ into your heart, he means “believe” and that asking Him into your heart is just another way of saying “believe.”

But do asking and believing mean the same thing? Isn’t asking doing something different than believing?

To further emphasize my point, let me ask you a question. If I quoted John 3:16 where Christ said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” and then added that you must also bow to the east, would you be believing Christ or me if you believed that? Obviously the answer would be me, not Christ. And do you think that a person who believed in Christ but still thought he had to bow to the east to go to heaven would go to heaven or hell? Well, your same answer would have to apply to a person who thinks he has to ask Christ into his heart to go to heaven. You see, just as there is no Scripture that teaches to bow to the east, there is no Scripture that says anything about asking Christ into your heart. The person who believes he must ask is believing what a person told him instead of what Jesus Christ said.

Also, look at it from this viewpoint. Scriptures teach that upon believing in Christ, certain things happen to the believer. He becomes a child of God; he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and he receives forgiveness for sins, just to mention a few.

Suppose an unbeliever were to pray to God to make him His child, would that make him a child of God? Of course not, since the Bible says to become a child of God, one must believe in Christ (John 1:12,13). What if an unbeliever were to ask for forgiveness, would he be forgiven? No, since forgiveness is conditioned upon believing in Christ (Acts 13:38,39). Lastly, what if a person were to ask Christ to indwell him, would He? No, since the person is asking God to do something He promises to do only for those individuals who believe.

Now someone might argue that a person wouldn't ask unless he believed, so this means there is nothing wrong with asking. But actually, the truth of the matter is that a person wouldn't ask if he did believe!

Let me explain. If a person understands that the only condition to have eternal life is to believe, then he wouldn't ask Christ to save him or to come into his heart because he knows that he is saved the moment he believes. If a person were to ask, that would simply indicate that the person didn't think believing was enough.

And can a person be saved if he thinks he must do more than believe? The Scriptures clearly teach that he cannot.

You may be thinking that to make an issue of asking is being "nit-picky" and splitting hairs over something that doesn't matter anyway. You may feel that any response to God in faith is sufficient for someone to be saved. However, Scriptures clearly teach that if a person thinks he must do anything more than believe in Christ for salvation, then he is not responding to God in faith. If a person thinks his prayer in some way confirms or completes his salvation, then he has not put his total trust in Christ for salvation and thus can't be saved.

In Galatians 1:8,9, there is a curse placed on anyone who teaches a gospel contrary to the one Paul presented. This passage reads, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed." Paul never preached that a person had to ask Christ into his heart to be saved, so someone who preaches that message is preaching a gospel other than the one Paul preached and is under the curse of God. It's a serious matter to be teaching something other than what the Scriptures teach for salvation because anything different from what is proclaimed in its pages cannot save a person from hell.

WHAT ABOUT REVELATION 3:20?

One verse, however, which has been used by people to say the Bible does teach that one must invite Christ in is Revelation 3:20. But if you read Revelation 3:14-20, you will find that this passage is not written to tell a person what he has to do to go to heaven, but rather it is written to those who already know they are going to heaven, telling them what to do to be God's obedient children.

Hebrews 12:5-11 make it clear that God chastens only His children, and in Revelation 3:19, Christ said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”

Then Christ went on to say to His disobedient children, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” Please note that Christ never said anything about coming into a person’s heart. It would not even make sense since He is talking about eating a meal with that person.

When Christ spoke these words, they were understood perfectly by His hearers, because of the customs of the day. Back then, when a person knocked at the door, instead of opening it to see who it was, you would ask who it was, and if you recognized his voice and identified him as a friend, you would let him in. And if two friends had stopped being friends and they wanted to renew their friendship, they would have a meal together. So Christ is saying that He wants to be friends with these disobedient children of His.

In John 15:14, He said, “You are My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you.” If a person has trusted Christ as His Savior, he is God’s child no matter what he does, but he is not God’s friend unless he is doing the things God says to do. Thus Christ was offering renewed fellowship, not salvation.

The misuse of Revelation 3:20 has caused many people to think they are going to heaven when they really aren’t. Instead of trusting Christ to take them to heaven, they are trusting Him to come into their heart, which He never promised to do in response to asking.

You may object, thinking you know many people who have been saved by believing that verse. I ask you on what authority do you base your judgment? It certainly could not be from that verse since it is clearly written concerning service, not salvation.

WHAT ABOUT FIRST JOHN 1:9?

Some have used First John 1:9 to support the idea that unless one asks for forgiveness for his sins, he can’t go to heaven. It says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

It is interesting to note, however, that the man who wrote First John also wrote the Gospel of John. In his Gospel account John stated that his purpose in writing it was so a person could have eternal life. He wrote, “But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His Name” (John 20:31). Does it seem reasonable that in his Gospel account the Apostle John wouldn’t once mention asking for forgiveness as a condition for salvation since he stated that his whole purpose in writing it was so a person could have eternal life?

In the Gospel of John, he said the only condition to have eternal life was to believe in Christ. But in First John, he explains his main purpose for writing this epistle was “That you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (First John 1:3). And one of the requirements mentioned in First John for having fellowship with God is confession of sin.

So this first epistle of John was not addressed to unbelievers to tell them how to be saved; it was addressed to believers (he calls them “my little children” in First John 2:1) to tell them how to have fellowship with the Lord.

The forgiveness needed by the unbeliever is different from the forgiveness needed by the believer. The unbeliever faces God as a Judge, and upon believing in Christ, his sins are forgiven on a legal basis. He receives forgiveness for his past, present and future sins (Hebrews 10:10,12,14). Thereafter, when he sins, it is not a matter between a lawbreaker and a Judge, it is a matter between a child and his Father.

So First John 1:9 is addressed to believers who are serving the Lord and presents the basis on which their fellowship with the Lord can be maintained. Also, the word “confess” is present subjunctive tense, speaking of continuous action. The unbeliever needs to believe only once, but the believer will many times need to confess because no believer ever reaches a place of sinless perfection. Even the Apostle John, after having been a believer for over 25 years, included himself when he said, “If we confess our sins.”

IS PRAYER OR CONFESSION OF CHRIST NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

And exactly when is the person who does believe in Christ saved, the very second he believes, or must he still pray or confess Christ first?

When Peter was preaching the Gospel to Cornelius and his family and friends, he said, “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Now when exactly were these people saved? Scripture explains, “while Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word” (Acts 10:44).

These verses make it clear that the second a person believes in Christ, he is saved; therefore, confessing Christ has absolutely nothing to do with salvation.

But what about Romans 10:9, where it says, “That if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus,” (literally, ‘Jesus as Lord’), “and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.”

Isn’t Paul saying that a person must confess with his mouth to be saved? No, because in verse 4 of the same chapter Paul had just explained that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Does it seem reasonable that Paul, after having explained that man’s only acceptance before God is his faith, would now add an act of righteousness?

Notice in verse one of Romans 10 that Paul is speaking in reference to unbelieving Israel who denies the deity of Christ. He’s telling them that if they recognize or acknowledge Jesus as Lord (Deity) and believe that God raised Him from the dead, then they would be saved.

Verse ten clarifies the purpose of confession. “For with the heart man believes unto” (literally, ‘because of’) “righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto” (‘because of’) “salvation.” Therefore, a person is saved because he believes and with his mouth he simply acknowledges it because he is saved.

Whether he chooses to verbally acknowledge this fact or not has nothing to do with his salvation, nor is it a result of salvation. A good example is John 12:42, which says, “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”

But what about Romans 10:11, where it says, “For the Scripture says, Whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed?” The Greek explains this verse because it literally reads, “Whosoever believes in Him will not be put to shame,” which means if you’ve trusted Christ to save you, He’s not going to disappoint you and not save you.

But doesn’t it say, “For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13)? Yes, and this is referring to prayer, but when it speaks of being saved, it is not speaking of salvation from hell. The Apostle Paul is using an Old Testament reference to Jehovah and applying it to Christ to prove the deity of Jesus Christ. Every time you read in Scripture that someone called on the Lord, it was someone who already was a child of God. And to prove that Romans 10:13 is no exception, I want you to read the very next verse. It says, “How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed?” (Romans 10:14).

Paul is saying that a person cannot call upon the Name of the Lord unless he has already believed in Christ (calling on His Name won’t save you from hell, but believing on His Name will). A person is saved from hell the moment he believes and now, because he is a child of God, he is in a position to call upon God to save him from circumstances in his life. And the promise of Romans 10:12 is that “the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.”

Now there is such a thing as confessing Christ for attaining rewards in heaven. Second Corinthians 5:20 states, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ.” As Christ’s ambassadors, believers are commanded to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

The way a believer treats Christ right now is determining how Christ is going to treat him when He returns. “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32,33).

And what exactly is this denial? Mark 8:38 explains, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

Good works do have their place therefore, not to get a person to heaven, but rather to get a person rewards in heaven and blessings on earth.

IS REPENTANCE NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

Now you may be wondering where repentance fits into all this. Isn't it necessary for salvation?

The answer is determined by how you define repentance. In English the primary definition of repent is to amend or resolve to amend one's life as a result of contrition for one's sins. It also can mean to feel regret and to change one's mind. To add to the confusion, there are two different words translated repent in the New Testament. Since the original languages of the Bible are Hebrew and Greek, it is to them we must turn to determine the exact definition of a word.

The Greek word which is normally translated repentance in the New Testament is metanoia. Repent (metanoeo), the verb form of metanoia, is a word made from the preposition meta, meaning after, and the verb noeo, meaning to perceive, and to think, as the result of perceiving or observing, so the compound means to think differently after, to reconsider. Thus, repentance is merely a change of mind. The idea that this word means a change of mind which issues in regret and a change of conduct, has absolutely no basis, since this idea does not lie in the word etymologically nor by primary usage.

If you didn't know one word of Greek, you could deduce from Scripture which states that salvation is "not of yourselves" (Ephesians 2:8,9) that this word (metanoeo) could not possibly mean a change of mind which issues in regret and a change of conduct since sorrow for sin and a change of conduct would certainly be considered doing something of yourself. It is only because people misunderstand the doctrine of salvation by faith alone that they read into the word metanoeo a meaning involving human effort.

To further prove scripturally that the word metanoeo simply means a change of mind, let's again look at John's stated purpose for writing his Gospel account. John 20:31, says, "But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His Name."

In his Gospel account, John used the word believe about 100 times and not once used the word repent. Why? Because in order for a person to trust Christ as his

Savior, he must change his mind about the way he thinks a person gets to heaven and believe on Christ to take him there!

Another proof that a person doesn't have to feel sorrow to be saved is the fact that the other Greek word that is translated repent does mean to feel regret or sorrow. That Greek word is *metamelomai*, but it is never used as a condition for salvation. It is used of Judas in Matthew 27:3, which says, "Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders." Judas felt regret and remorse over his betrayal of Jesus.

If sorrow for sin were necessary for salvation, then the Greek word meaning sorrow for sin would have been used in the Gospel of John as a condition for salvation. But neither this word or the other Greek word translated repentance, *metanoeo*, is found in the Gospel of John. And, it bears repeating that the particular word *metamelomai*, which does mean to feel regret or sorrow, is never used as a condition for salvation.

For those who believe repentance means turning from sin or feeling sorry for sin, I would like to bring up two examples which show the translators understood repentance *metanoia* to be nothing more than a change of mind. The first is found in Hebrews 12:16,17, where it speaks of Esau, who sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a single meal. Verse 17 says, "For you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears." If you are familiar with the story recorded in the Old Testament, you know that Jacob had tricked his blind father into thinking he was Esau and had thereby procured the blessing of the firstborn that would have naturally been given to Esau.

When Esau found out that his younger brother had gotten the blessings of the firstborn, he pleaded with his father. But it says, "he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Hebrews 12:17). This means that he found no way of changing his father's mind.

The second example is found in Exodus where it is recorded that God repented. This happened at the time when the children of Israel had worshipped the golden calf which Aaron had built. The Lord was going to wipe them out, but because

Moses interceded on their behalf the Lord repented. It says, in Exodus 32:14, “And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto His people.” What exactly did God do when it says He repented? He changed His mind. And what does an unbeliever do when he repents? He changes his mind. Instead of thinking that the way to be accepted by God is through his efforts, he must change his thinking and believe the way to be accepted by God is by faith alone in the risen Savior. That is biblical repentance!

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEAD AND HEART BELIEF?

Some people have accused me of teaching “easy believism.” In essence, they are saying that faith holds some merit because they are saying that the way you believe is the determining point in your salvation rather than the object of your faith, which is Jesus Christ. Of course, there is a difference between believing facts about Jesus Christ (such as His virgin birth and His resurrection) and believing in Him to be your Savior. But the difference is in what you believe, not how you believe. Let me illustrate. Suppose a good friend of yours were to promise to give you five dollars tomorrow. Who or what gives you the money, your friend, or your faith in your friend? Christ promises to save all those who believe in Him. It is not a person’s faith that saves him, but the object of his faith, Jesus Christ.

Some people even go so far as to make a distinction between believing in one’s head and believing in one’s heart. The basis of this teaching is the assumption that the word “believe” means more than intellectual assent. However, the Greek word translated “believe” is “pisteuo,” and it literally means “to believe, trust, or rely upon,” nothing more.

But doesn’t the Bible teach that a person must believe in his heart? Yes, but what exactly is the heart? Does this mean that a person must believe with his emotions, intellect and will?

The primary meaning of the word “heart” is “mind.” It is interesting to note that the Greek word for “bowels” is synonymous with our word “heart” and the Greek word for “heart” is synonymous with our word “mind.” According to Greek scholars, “bowels” referred to one’s feelings and affections. Good Scriptural examples of this are found in First John 3:17 and Matthew 9:36. The same Greek word is translated “bowels of compassion” in the former verse and “compassion” in the latter.

When Christ referred to the heart, He was primarily referring to the thinking and reasoning faculties of man. Examples of this are found in Matthew 9:4 and Luke 5:22:

“And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think you evil in your hearts?” (Matthew 9:4);

“But when Jesus perceived their thoughts He answering said unto them, What reason you in your hearts?” (Luke 5:22)

It is also interesting to note that while Romans 10:9,10 talk about believing with your heart, in verse six of the same chapter it says, “Say not in your heart...” This phrase was a Hebraism for “think not.” So speaking in your heart and believing in your heart both refer to a mental process.

Those who teach that it is not enough to give intellectual assent are saying by their own definition that Abraham and all those who follow his example of faith are not saved! What exactly do I mean?

In Romans 4:21-24, it explains, “And being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his” (Abraham’s) “sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

Scripture’s own definition of faith is “being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform” (Romans 4:21). Thus, faith is simply taking God at His word.

Christ made this clear in John 5:46 and 47, when He said, “For had you believed Moses, you would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if you believe not his writings, how shall you believe My words?” If these unbelievers had taken Moses at his word, since he prophesied of Christ, they would have taken Christ at His word.

MUST CHRIST BE ONE’S LORD TO BE ONE’S SAVIOR?

Now some teach that the faith which saves a person must include a commitment of that person’s life. These individuals use the phrase, “receive Christ as Savior and

Lord.” In other words, they are saying if you want Christ as your Savior, you must be willing to make Him the Lord and Master of your life.

This, however, is not in accordance with Scripture concerning what a person must do to have eternal life. We don’t give Christ control of our lives or anything else. He gives us eternal life as a free gift, by just trusting in Him. When you start talking about making Christ the Lord of your life, you are then talking about service, not salvation!

If giving your life to God were a condition to receive eternal life, the Apostle Paul would not have pleaded with Christians to do just that. In Roman 12:1, he said, “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” If Paul considered a commitment of one’s life a separate and subsequent decision apart from salvation, shouldn’t we also? He placed a commitment under the category of service to God, not salvation.

There is a vast difference between believing in Jesus Christ and serving Him. Believing in Christ results in one’s becoming a child of God, while serving the Lord results in one’s becoming a disciple. Salvation is the result of Christ’s work on the cross, received by faith. Nothing in the life of the believer adds to or takes away from his perfect security; salvation cannot be lost. But discipleship comes only through a life of dedicated service to the Lord and can be lost because it is based upon the believer’s faithfulness. Salvation secures a place in heaven, while discipleship secures rewards in heaven. Before embarking upon a life of service for the Lord, Christ cautions to count the cost (Luke 14:26-33). How different is the offer of salvation in which the Lord beckons, “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

In John chapter 8, it clearly shows the distinction between believing in Christ as Savior and becoming a disciple. It records how that in response to Christ’s teaching, many became believers. Jesus addressed those who believed in Him and explained that to become His disciple it was required that they continue in His word. It says in John 8:30-32, “As He spake these words, many believed on Him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed: and you shall know the truth and the truth shall

make you free.” Thus, all believers are not disciples – only those who commit their lives to Him.

Surrendering or yielding your life to the Lord is certainly something of yourself. If you thought you had to give Christ control of your life in order to be saved, you would be depending upon your giving of yourself to Him plus your trusting Him to get you to heaven. This is a mixture of God’s grace and your works. A requirement for being God’s obedient child is to allow Christ to control your life. To take a requirement for obedience and make it a requirement for salvation is nothing less than teaching good works for salvation.

BUT IF YOU REALLY BELIEVE, WON’T YOU SHOW IT?

Some people say that if you really believe in something, then your life will show it, meaning of course, that if you truly believe in Christ, then you will follow Him.

But is it really true that if you truly believe in something, your life will evidence that belief? Don’t you know a lot of people who believe, who truly believe, they must be good to go to heaven, but who aren’t being good themselves?

Besides, when you trust Christ to save you, what you’re believing is that He’s the One getting you to heaven. You’re not trusting Him with your life here on earth.

Trusting Him with your life here is a separate decision from trusting Him with your eternal destiny. Salvation is reliance on His work alone. Trusting Him to live through you is a decision which is to be made after you’re saved. And if you do have faith or trust in Him in this regard, then your life will show it because believing in Christ to live through you requires work, faith AND work.

DOESN’T A PERSON’S LIFE AUTOMATICALLY CHANGE?

Many use Second Corinthians 5:17 to prove that a person’s life will automatically change after he trusts Christ. This verse says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:” (literally, ‘there is a new creation’) “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Please note that it doesn’t mention anything about a gradual change but dogmatically states that “all things are become new.” It is not speaking of a transformation, but of a new creation, the bringing in of a new thing, not the change of the old. Furthermore, for everyone who is in the new creation, the old has passed away – there can be no return to it.

Also, the very next verse says, “And all things are of God Who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ.” So when he speaks of being a “new creature,” he isn’t speaking about the condition of a believer’s life, but rather of his new position.

Every man is part of the old creation by physical birth. Scripture describes every unbeliever as spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). Upon believing the Gospel, an individual is born into God’s family and thus becomes part of the new creation.

By very nature the things that do constitute “all things” referred to in this passage are of necessity the work of God. What person could take himself out of the power of darkness and place himself into the kingdom of the Son (Colossians 1:13)? Who could make himself a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20)? Who could produce the new birth (John 1:13) and place within himself the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:12,13)?

Another proof that Second Corinthians 5:17 isn’t speaking of a changed life is the phrase “in Christ.” Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He has made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” In other words, the way to have eternal life is not found in what we do ourselves, which amounts to self-righteousness, but rather in having a perfect righteousness given to us when we trust Christ as our Savior. Now when God looks at me as far as salvation goes, He no longer sees me in my fallen condition, but rather, He sees what Christ did for me (placed me in a new position); so from that viewpoint, all things are become new.

The fact that this verse is ever used to show a person’s life changes is ironic because it just so happens that it was written to the worst group of believers addressed in the New Testament. Just to mention a few of the things they were guilty of, one of them was committing incest and the rest were condoning it (First Corinthians 5:1-5); some were getting drunk at the Lord’s Supper (First Corinthians 11:20-32); there was division and strife among them (First Corinthians 3:3,4); and they were falling for false teachers (Second Corinthians 11:4). So this clearly shows that this verse couldn’t possibly be referring to a person’s life changing.

In contrast with the teachings of the changed life, the Bible teaches that for those who decide to serve the Lord, the battle has just begun. The old nature is in

rebellion against God's will and doesn't want to submit to Him (Romans 8:7); it is in warfare against the new nature (Galatians 5:16). The believer though, who consistently yields to his new nature is promised that the Holy Spirit will produce these characteristics in his life: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith" (literally, 'faithfulness'), "meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22,23).

Just as there are laws in the physical universe, there are also spiritual laws, one namely, "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). A believer has the choice of yielding to his old nature and reaping God's chastening (Hebrews 12:6), or yielding to his new nature and reaping God's blessings (James 1:25).

The people who preach that your life changes when you believe are in essence saying that the Holy Spirit automatically takes control without your having to yield to Him. If that were the case, then why are believers commanded to be controlled by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)? And why does the Bible make a distinction between a carnal and a spiritual believer?

The Apostle Paul, when addressing the Corinthians who had been believers for about five years, wrote, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ... For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal?" This is found in First Corinthians 3:1-3. Paul looked at these believers' lives and saw the results of their being controlled by the old nature (envy, strife, division). He didn't ask them to question their salvation, nor did he question their salvation (he still called them brothers), but rather told them they were carnal believers. He didn't tell them that a Christian couldn't do those things, for he knew only too well that when a person becomes a Christian, his old nature isn't eradicated or in any way changed.

In Romans 7:19, Paul told of the battle he found true in his own life when he attempted to live the Christian life in his own strength. "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Think of it, one of the greatest believers of all time was fighting to do the right things that he himself didn't want to do and he was fighting not to do wrong things that he wanted to do.

What the Apostle Paul did tell these believers though, is that there are godly incentives to live a godly life. One of these is found in First Corinthians 3:8, "... every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." This is the same encouragement Christ gave to His children when He told them, "... lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20).

Let's look at the passage where Paul describes the judgment for a Christian's works. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw: every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (First Corinthians 3:11-15).

Paul compares the believer's life to a building which is being erected on the foundation of Jesus Christ, Himself. Only those works done for Christ, which are compared to gold, silver, and precious stones, will be rewarded. Works not done for Christ amount to wood, hay and straw and will result in a loss of rewards for the believer. This passage says very clearly that after some people became believers, they did absolutely nothing for the Lord. They are just as much saved as the ones who did something for Christ; the difference however will be in the rewards they receive.

HOW DOES A PERSON EXPERIENCE A CHANGED LIFE?

God's will for all His children is that they experience a changed life. Jesus explained how this was possible. It says in John 8:31,32, "Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on Him, If you continue in My Word, then are you My disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The Lord was speaking of making them free from being slaves to sin, which is referred to in verse 34.

Everyone is born with a fallen human nature inherited from our foreparent Adam (Romans 5:12,19). When a person is born into God's family, he receives a new nature, which is the Holy Spirit, Himself, indwelling that person (First Corinthians 6:19,20).

Just as the old nature is the source of our sinful inclinations, now any source of righteousness will spring from the Holy Spirit. At any given moment, the believer is either controlled by his old or new nature. The believer determines which by yielding to one or the other.

Romans 6:13,16 state, “Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God ... Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey.” If you are habitually yielding to your old nature, you are a slave to that nature and are termed a carnal believer. However, if you are habitually yielding to your new nature, you are God’s servant and are called a spiritual believer.

And what exactly does it mean to yield? If you were to tell your son to mow the lawn and he were to reply, “Dad, I’m yielding to you right now; I have the proper mental attitude,” however, he doesn’t mow the lawn, is he yielded? Of course not. Christ commanded all believers, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). You aren’t yielding until you are obeying that command.

CAN A CHRISTIAN BE IDENTIFIED BY HIS WORKS?

There is a major distinction drawn in the Word of God between what a person has to do to become a child of God and what a person has to do to be an obedient child of God.

One is attained through faith in what Jesus Christ already accomplished 2,000 years ago and the other is attained through faith in what Jesus Christ is doing currently, coupled with works performed by the believer. Failure to separate the two has resulted in needless confusion and a message that will not save a person from going to hell.

One becomes a child of God by faith and one becomes a disciple, or an obedient believer, by faith and works. The way I can know a person is a believer is by his words, not his works; but the way I know a person is a disciple is by his works, not his words. And those who think that you can tell whether a person is a Christian or not by his life often quote the Scripture, “You shall know them by their fruits.”

But of whom was Christ speaking when He said, “You shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16)? Verse 15 explains, “Beware of false prophets, which come

to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them" (false prophets) "by their fruits."

Christ was telling them how to determine whether a person was a false prophet or not. Please note that you wouldn't be able to tell they were wolves by looking at them; they were disguised as sheep. Let's read on.

"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:18-20).

We can know that these fruits cannot be good works because, continuing in Matthew, Christ said, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your Name? And in Your Name have cast out devils? And in Your Name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them I never knew you: depart from Me, you who WORK iniquity" (Matthew 7:22,23). Christ was foretelling of a day in which many erroneously will think they will be spending eternity with Him on the basis of their works. So obviously the fruit is not good works. Christ said, in verse 21, "Not everyone who says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven."

And what is God's will for the unbeliever? Jesus said, "And this is the will of Him Who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). So the reason these people were told to depart is because they thought they were going to spend eternity with God because of what they did; they had never believed on the Son for eternal life.

So how can we identify a false prophet? What exactly is the fruit? Christ, Himself, explained, in Matthew 12:33-37, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they

shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.”

Thus I can determine whether a person is a false prophet by his message, not his deeds. In fact, if the way a person lived determined whether he were a Christian or not, then the religious leaders who rejected Christ would be considered Christians.

Christ Himself said of the scribes and Pharisees, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appears righteous unto men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:27,28).

Thus, I repeat, the way I know a person is a Christian is by his words. If a person tells me that he thinks he has to be good to go to heaven, then I know by his words that he is not depending on Jesus Christ to get him there. And the way I can identify a disciple is by his works.

ISN'T THE CHRISTIAN LIFE A WALK OF FAITH?

Many times when I speak of serving the Lord in terms of good works, people accuse me of denying that an obedient believer’s life is a walk of faith – let me explain.

Trusting Christ as Savior is a one-time act in which you are trusting Him with your eternal destiny. It can never be repeated. Just as you were once physically born into this world, a person is once spiritually born into God’s family when he trusts Christ as his Savior. This is what Scripture defines as being “born again” (John 1:12,13; 3:3).

Now as a child of God, you are told to walk by faith (Colossians 2:6). And walking by faith is simply trusting Jesus Christ to live His life through you day by day. As Galatians 2:20 states, “I am” (literally, ‘I have been’) “crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

And how do I know if I am walking by faith? Simple. Faith in the Christian life will always be accompanied by works. James 2:18 explains, “Yea, a man may say,

You have faith, and I have works: show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

When you talk about walking by faith and say that this walk is other than a life of good works, then you are the individual to whom the phrase “faith without works is dead” is addressed.

A parallel can be drawn with Christ’s words when He said, “If a man loves Me, he will keep My words ... He that loves Me not does not keep My sayings” (John 14:23,24).

Thus Jesus Christ, Himself, said the criterion for knowing whether a man loves Him or not is his works, not his words. A person can talk about how much he loves Him, yet if he isn’t keeping His commandments, does He love Christ? So if a man were to say he has faith, yet he doesn’t have works, does he have faith? No, because faith without works is dead.

But can a person have faith in Christ to save him and not have faith in his Christian life? Yes, because faith in the Christian life produces works, which result in rewards, but we have already read where some believers will have no rewards in heaven. First Corinthians 3:15 says, “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” This verse clearly teaches that there will be believers in heaven with no rewards. And again, the only way that could happen is if a person did no work for Christ. First Corinthians 3:8 says, “... every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.” Thus these particular people did have faith in Christ to save them, but they never had faith in their Christian life. They were saved by faith, but they never walked by faith.

And what works are involved in this walk of faith? The four basic ones are:

- 1) Sharing the Gospel (Matthew 4:19, 2 Corinthians 5:20 2) Studying the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15, 1 Peter 2:2
- 3) Praying (1 Thessalonians 5:17); and
- 4) Meeting with other believers (Hebrews 10:25).

Every person who trusts Christ as his Savior is born into God’s family a spiritual baby. God’s will for His children is that they grow to be spiritually mature Christians. Just as you must eat properly and exercise to be physically fit, so in

order to be spiritually fit, you must study the Bible (which is likened unto food) and put into practice the things you learn from the Bible (which is exercising spiritually).

One of the distinguishing characteristics separating spiritual babes from the spiritually mature is Bible knowledge. A lack of knowledge on the part of believers is responsible for much confusion concerning doctrine. Instead of comparing Scripture with Scripture, they begin comparing teacher with teacher and by so doing, leave themselves open for every kind of false teaching. The Apostle Paul admonished concerning this very thing when he said, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

And when it comes to the doctrine of salvation, the Scriptures teach that faith and works can’t be mixed. It says in Romans 11:6, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.”

But some might object saying, “Doesn’t James chapter 2 teach that faith without works is dead?” Yes, but this has absolutely nothing to do with salvation; it has to do with discipleship.

James 2 is probably one of the most misused and misunderstood chapters in the Bible. It is used by some people to teach that faith in Christ alone will not save you. Others teach that if your life doesn’t change when you trust Christ, it is evidence that you really didn’t believe, (which is like putting salvation on the level of a small pox vaccination that perhaps won’t take). Both of these ideas have led to a warped view of the Scriptures.

As for people who use this passage to support the idea that faith alone won’t save a person, let me explain. Heaven is either a gift or a reward; either it is determined by what we do or we have absolutely no part in it. Romans 4:5 states, “But to him that does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” As previously quoted, the Apostle Paul said, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.” That’s like saying, “If heaven is a gift, then it is not a reward: otherwise a gift is not a gift.”

And for a person to say that faith without works is dead with reference to salvation is for him to say a free gift is a reward, which it can't be.

WHY DOES JAMES SAY, "FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD?"

The epistle of James was written to a group of people who were already children of God. James addressed them as brethren. In James 1:22,25, he went on to say to them, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves ... But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed" (not saved) "in his deed."

Good works don't have any part in making you a child of God, but they certainly determine whether you are an obedient child of God or not. Obedience results in God's blessings in a person's life, whereas, disobedience results in God's chastening. It is not the person who knows God's will that God is going to bless, but rather the one who does His will.

The believers whom James was addressing were guilty of showing favoritism to the rich people who came to their assembly. They claimed to be loving their neighbors as themselves, but in actuality they were hypocrites. They were treating people differently because they didn't have money or dress well (James 2:1-11). So James admonishes them, "So speak, and so do, as they that shall be judged" (literally, 'as they who are about to be judged') "by the law of liberty ... What does is profit, my brethren, though a man says he has faith, and has not works? Can faith save him?" (James 2:12,14).

The Greek construction of the question, "can faith save Him?" requires a negative answer; therefore, the reply is, "no, faith alone cannot save him."

Now according to Ephesians 2:8,9, in order to be saved, a person must have faith and no works; yet according to James 2:14, a person can't be saved without works. Some people have tried to explain this away by saying that the faith that saves produces works; however, James didn't say faith produces works; he said faith alone can't save.

JAMES WAS WARNING OF IMPENDING DISCIPLINE

The problem is quickly solved when you realize that the word "saved" isn't always used in reference to salvation from hell. In James 5:15 he uses it in reference to

being saved from physical death, and in James 2:14 he uses it in reference to being saved from God's discipline.

James was warning of impending discipline the Lord was going to bring into these Christians' lives. It is not the believer who talks the good talk who avoids God's discipline; it is the believer who lives the good life.

These believers talked about love but were not practicing it. James 2:15-17 explain, "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful to the body; what does it profit? Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone."

Words alone could not supply the needy believers with food and clothing. Telling someone who is cold and hungry to be warmed and filled is to do absolutely nothing for that person. To be of profit, those words must be accompanied by works. They were to supply food and clothing for those in need, not just talk, because, "faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone."

These believers apparently claimed to have faith, but without works, that sort of faith could not save them from God's judgment in their lives. That's why James said, "So speak, and so DO, as they that shall be judged" (literally, 'are about to be judged') "by the law of liberty" (James 2:12).

Now since James was addressing believers, he was not talking about their receiving judgment in hell. For the believer there is no such thing as coming into judgment as far as one's eternal destiny is concerned. Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he who hears My word, and believes on Him who sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation;" (literally, 'judgment') "but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

James makes it abundantly clear that he is speaking of faith in the Christian life, and faith in the Christian life will always manifest itself in works. A parallel passage can be found in First John 3:17,18, "But whoso has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." If I say I love fellow believers, yet when they are in need I don't help them out, then in truth, I don't love them.

BUT EVEN THE DEMONS BELIEVE AND THEY TREMBLE

Many times those who think that one must submit to the Lordship of Christ in order to be saved will support their view by the passage in James which says the demons believe and tremble.

James wrote, “You believe that there is one God; you do well: the demons also believe, and tremble. But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:19,20).

People who use these verses to teach that it is not enough just to believe in Christ for salvation don’t realize what they are saying.

First of all, there is a big difference between believing in Christ and believing that there is one God. Believing that there is one God is not going to save anyone – even the Jews who rejected Christ believed that.

Second, why would James use demons as an example of saving faith when there is no hope of demons being saved anyway. The Scriptures teach that since Christ didn’t die for angels (Hebrews 2:16).

So James is not using the demons to prove that you have to do more than just believe in Christ to save you from hell. James was using satire to reprimand these disobedient believers. To paraphrase, he is saying, “Big deal if you believe in God, so do the demons. You can talk all you want about faith, but without works all your so-called faith is dead.”

James continues by using Abraham as an example. Verse 21 states, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar?”

Now in Romans 4:3-5, Paul uses Abraham as an example of a man who was justified by faith alone, apart from any works. “For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

It sounds like a contradiction between Paul and James, but in reality, they are speaking of two different events in Abraham’s life. Paul, in the book of Romans, deals with the faith Abraham had which resulted in his salvation and James deals

with the faith Abraham had which resulted in his friendship with the Lord. It was by faith alone that Abraham became a child of God, but it was by his faith and works that he became a friend of God. It is important to realize that there are more than thirty years between the two occurrences referred to by Paul and James.

Notice at what time in Abraham's life he was justified by works. James 2:21 says, "when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar." God had already promised Abraham that the Messiah was going to come through the line of his son Isaac. Isaac was unmarried at the time, and Abraham knew he would yet have to marry and have a child in order for God's promise to be fulfilled. When Abraham was commanded by the Lord to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, he knew God wouldn't break His promise and he trusted God to raise Isaac from the dead.

And where did I get that? Hebrews 11:17-19 explain, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall your seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure."

When God told Abraham to go and offer his son as a burnt offering, Abraham could have replied, "Now Lord, I know You've already promised to have the Messiah come through Isaac and I know You can raise him up from the dead, but there is no way I'm going to take his life." Abraham could talk all he wanted about faith but the proof that he really did have faith was his works. Without the works, there is no faith. However, Abraham truly did have faith that the Lord would do what He promised as was proven by his obedience and Abraham "was called the friend of God" (James 2:23).

Once a person is a child of God, he is always God's child regardless of what he does (John 6:37). However, a person is not God's friend unless he is doing the things God commands. Jesus Christ said, "You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14).

Being God's friend is synonymous with what the Bible terms "fellowship." The word "fellowship" means "partnership" and conveys the idea of having things in common with another individual. Thus, a believer who claims to be having fellowship with the Lord and is living a life of sin obviously is not having

fellowship. He will come under the chastening hand of God, but nonetheless, he is still on his way to heaven.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN?

With this distinction in mind, some verses in the Epistle of First John touching on the same subject become clear. The First Epistle of John was written combatting a false teaching called “gnosticism.” The “Gnostics,” as they were called, were a group of people who claimed to have a special relationship with the Lord and yet they believed it didn’t matter how a person lived. The word “Gnostic” comes from the Greek word “gnosis” which means “to know by experience.” Nine times the Apostle John presents tests for knowing whether a person is in fellowship and he uses the verb “ginosko” from which the Gnostics got their name. John made it abundantly clear that the way a person lives has everything to do with knowing the Lord as a Friend.

Now the word “ginosko” is not to be confused with another word also translated “to know” in First John and that is the word “oida.” The word “oida” is not speaking of an experiential knowledge, but rather of knowing something as a fact. For instance, First John 5:13 explains that those who believe in Christ can know as a fact that they have eternal life. To further illustrate, think of the relationship between a father and a son. The son knows as a fact that he is his father’s son, but if asked if he were his father’s friend, his answer would be based on his past and present experiences with him.

With this distinction in mind, let’s look at First John 2:4 where the word “ginosko” (meaning, “know by experience”) is used. “He who says, I know Him and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him.” Thus, he is not speaking here of knowing Christ as Savior but rather of knowing Him as Friend. And he makes it clear that knowing Christ as a Friend is based on the way a person lives.

Another word which is helpful to know in distinguishing between salvation and fellowship is the word “abide,” which is the Greek word “meno.” It literally means, “to abide, to remain in a close and settled union.” It is used often of persons abiding in a home and implies friendship and communion.

With this understanding, let's look at First John 2:6, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." So again, John is saying that knowing the Lord as Friend, abiding in Him, has to do with the way we live.

Sadly enough, what was intended by the Apostle John to let a person know if he were in fellowship with the Lord or not has been misused by some as being the proof of one's salvation. This has resulted in needless despair for many and in false assurance for others. We are not to determine whether we're saved by the experiences in our lives; we're to base it upon the never changing Word of God. Christ said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

IN CONCLUSION

The reason I wrote this booklet is because of my concern for people. I know, only because the Bible teaches it, that unless a person is depending solely upon Christ's work to get him to heaven, he will spend eternity in hell. That really bothers me, and that's why I have dedicated my whole life to getting this message out.

Paul wrote that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for every person who believes it (Romans 1:16). Picture, if you will, a circle representing the Gospel. Anything outside of the circle comes under the category of human effort. The further the person is from the circle, the clearer he sees the issue – God's grace versus his works. The closer he gets to the truth, however, the harder it is to see. How much better to be far away and realize how lost you are. About ninety-nine percent of these people, when asked if they think they're going to heaven, reply "I hope so," because they believe heaven is determined by the way they live their lives.

How sad to talk to people who are just as lost (there are no degrees of being lost, either you are lost or have been saved by Christ), but because of some experience they have had are totally blind to their true condition. They feel secure in the fact they have "accepted Christ" and "know" they are on their way to heaven. Perhaps you reading this right now are one of these people. If you have never depended on Christ alone, understanding that asking Christ into your heart, or confessing Christ, or whatever has no part in trusting Christ, why not do it now?

The Name “Jesus” means “God our Savior.” If you place your faith in Him alone you can know as a fact you possess eternal life. You can have Scriptural assurance of your salvation!

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the Name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life.” (First John 5:13)