

SALVATION

// AND //

DISCIPLESHIP

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

LUCAS KITCHEN

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Notes

ORIGIN STORY

I was extremely frustrated with the churches where I had worked. I had begun to see the Bible as ambiguous on some essential issues. I had spent nearly a decade in church ministry and had a degree from Bible College. I had started my seminary work but burned out because of the inconsistencies I saw in how different professors would explain the gospel. My frustration led me to make a swift exit from ministry when I was 27. I needed to cool my heels and get a handle on what the Bible truly said.

In this hiatus from vocational ministry, I got married, moved to Longview TX, began attending Cypress Valley Bible Church, and met Bob Bryant. He had been the lead teaching pastor there for a little over four decades. It was a casual acquaintance at first. I was little more than the husband of someone who grew up in his church.

However, Cypress Valley had something exceptional I had rarely seen in the churches at which I had previously attended. Bob's teaching drew me in instantly. His sermons were spiritually stimulating without appealing to empty emotional gimmicks. I got hooked to his consistent and logically satisfying exposition of scripture. It was remarkably refreshing since I had spent so many years in a ministry that teetered on the border of emotional manipulation, and muddy expressions of salvation.

At some point in that phase, Bob asked me to preach on a week that he was going to be out of town. In the process of discussing what I would talk about I asked him if he would mentor me. He accepted, and we continue to meet on a regular basis.

One Friday afternoon during one of our weekly meetings, I asked him about a difficult passage and how to understand it. He pulled out a simple piece of paper. I glanced at it not knowing what I was seeing. He said, "I can make a copy for you if you like." I

agreed, still not quite understanding the significance of the document. It was a single sheet that he had laid out in Microsoft Word, or something similar. I studied the sheet as he explained.

I didn't know at the time what was in store but, the book you are now holding had its beginning when I agreed to a photocopy of Bob's document. I learned, as he handed over the copied paper, he had been refining that sheet for the past 30 years.

It's safe to say that Bob Bryant produced the backbone for this book. The verse selection and the flow of ideas in these pages come from his study and teaching to the greatest extent possible. I discovered that the sheet was a result of not only his careful study but also what he had learned from his mentor Zane Hodges, who had been a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary for many years. Now as I attempt to pass it on to you, I imagine the impact it will have on those who read this book.

You are probably wondering what magical thread of ideas that document contained. Running down the simple sheet were two columns. They carried the headings "salvation" and "discipleship." Under these two column headings were 33 sets of Bible verses. Virtually every difficult-to-explain passage that I'd faced in recent years fit in one of those two categories, salvation or discipleship. Bob explained that most people's misunderstanding of various Bible verses came down to a confusion between salvation and discipleship. However, when difficult verses get placed into the context that was intended, either salvation or discipleship, the meaning almost always becomes incredibly natural. So, I had to try it out for myself. I took the sheet home and began my eager research, and the results were nearly magic.

I have come to see these two columns as a key that unlocks a brilliant understanding of the Bible. It's a legend for a biblical treasure map. I'm still on the journey, but I've been following it for a few years now, and it's changed the way I see Scripture and my

life in general. My frustration melted away as a logical and reasoned approach to the Bible was finally within my reach.

From the first time I saw and understood this ingeniously arranged document I knew I wanted to do something with it. Others needed to experience what I had. Understanding and observing scripture as well as possible is the key to a fulfilling and abundant life. This book and the other materials connected to it are a testimony to what I've learned from Bob and his teaching, study, and personal conversations.

On the following pages, you will discover, as I did, what I have come to call, "the document." The remainder of this book will be devoted to explaining the distinction between salvation and discipleship. We have often called this "the most important distinction in the Bible."

To see the video series, study guide, and Bible study materials that go along with this book visit simplybelief.com and click on Salvation and Discipleship. Without any further delays, I hope you enjoy Salvation And Discipleship: Is There A Difference?

INTRODUCTION

In this introduction I am going to make a handful of claims. I am not going to use the intro to defend those claims. Instead the rest of this book will be employed for that purpose. The basic idea that I've devoted nearly 50,000 words to explaining in the following pages can be summed up by these sets of pairs showing the difference between salvation and discipleship.

SALVATION is a one time event.

DISCIPLESHIP is a long term process.

SALVATION happens when someone believes in Jesus for everlasting life.

DISCIPLESHIP happens when a saved person decides to obey Jesus on a daily basis.

SALVATION happens the moment a person believes and receives the free gift of everlasting life.

DISCIPLESHIP begins that same moment but requires commitment and sacrifice to continue.

SALVATION cannot be earned, returned, or lost.

DISCIPLESHIP is either, rejected, neglected, or maintained.

SALVATION is something you have.

DISCIPLESHIP is something you do.

SALVATION is by belief in Jesus.

DISCIPLESHIP is by obedience to Jesus.

SALVATION is by faith.

DISCIPLESHIP is by works.

SALVATION results in eternal life in Heaven.

DISCIPLESHIP results in eternal reward in Heaven.

SALVATION is mandatory for entrance into Heaven.

DISCIPLESHIP is voluntary for the believer who has salvation.

If you're an average church going believer you will likely accept at least some of the above claims made about salvation and discipleship. If you find others of them difficult to accept, please don't jump over board. If you remain unconvinced after reading this book, that's fine. I know that it may stretch the concepts that you've been taught, but that's ok. These ideas stretched me almost to the breaking point, but I'm better because I was willing to investigate and consider. This book will argue from Scripture, not from my experience or emotions. Thus it's a worthy method for considering what it should mean for you and your life.

ONE:

F REE AND C OSTLY

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Imagine that you walk into a local store. As you look through the items, you find something that you're interested in buying. You pick it up and see no price tag attached. You hold it above your head and ask the clerk about the price.

"How much is this," you say. It's a simple question, right? You expect an equally simple answer.

"It's free, but it will cost you five dollars," the clerk says. She smiles as if she's delivered good news. You need clarification, so you ask once again.

"How can it be free and five dollars?"

"It's a free gift from the manufacturer, but they require that you pay five dollars for it," the clerk says. You feel an urge to argue but decide to put the item down instead. After setting it aside, you slink quietly out of the store. After all, the clerk is obviously deranged.

Now let's imagine that you go to your pastor's office the Monday after a very fiery sermon. His previous morning's sermon concerned you. You want to know how to be saved. If he is the average American pastor, the conversation will go something like this.

"What do I have to do to be saved?" you ask, hoping the price is not too much to pay. He might say a few things about sin and redemption before he lands on this well-worn statement.

"Salvation is free," your pastor says with a smile, but then he adds, "But it will cost you everything."

You wrinkle your nose trying to understand. The wheels in your head are turning now. *Is this a trick?* You think through the meaning of all the words he used, but you can't make sense of it. You ask once more for clarification, and he repeats his enigmatic statement.

"Salvation is free, but it will cost you everything," he says as if it's good news, rather than the ridiculous nonsense that it is.

The basic rules of logic prevent this obvious contradiction from being a successful sales tactic in a department store, yet pastors all over the world peddle this same illogical nonsense from their Sunday pulpits. There was a time in my life, as a minister, when I heard these exact words coming from my mouth. People have left the church in massive numbers in the last three decades, and it's no wonder when foolish phrases like this are the foundation of most gospel presentations.

So, what gives? The Bible certainly presents salvation as a free gift. In fact, it's so clearly stated that very few people deny it. Consider the second half of Romans 6:23:

...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. [¹](#)

This verse is so clear that virtually every pastor, evangelist, and lay person sharing the gospel uses it. Hardly any student of the Bible disputes that salvation, represented as eternal life in this verse, is a free gift. This is not the only place in the Bible that shows salvation to be a free gift. A quick thumb through the pages of your pocket New Testament reveals that salvation is certainly free. Consider these words found in the last half of Revelation 22:17:

...And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. [²](#)

If you read this verse alone, you would get the distinct impression that all you have to do to have salvation is to be convinced it's available and desire

to have it. That mirrors what John says all through his Gospel when he shows that eternal life comes as a free gift for all those who believe in Jesus.

Scores of other verses teach that salvation is a free gift. Most people seem to agree that Jesus offers salvation as a present and it's free of charge. The gift is paid for by Jesus' work on the cross. So why do so many tack on the second half of the saying that we reviewed earlier?

"Salvation is a free gift." That much we agree on because the Bible says so. However, many do not stop there but add on, "...but it will cost you everything." Where does this addition come from? Well, it comes from the Bible, actually. Consider these words from Luke 14:26-33:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. ³

At first glance, it may seem as if we have a problem. These verses seem to talk about cost and sacrifice as inseparable from the Christian life. This section from Luke is not the only one, either. There are dozens of places in the Bible that give us this same lesson. There is a cost involved for those who follow Jesus. This idea is so fundamental that virtually no Bible student can deny it.

This is how the phrase was born, "Salvation is free, but it will cost you everything." Maybe, now you can see the difficulty that arises from trying to harmonize these two sets of verses. The first verses I mentioned clearly say that salvation is free and the second set clearly say that to be Jesus' disciple is costly. This bothered me for years. I really struggled with it, trying to understand how something could be both free and costly.

The answer to that question changed the way I thought about the entire Bible. Before I understood, it felt like the teeth were grinding in my mental gearbox. Once I understood, it felt like all the gears lined up and started spinning like mad. Once I was finally given the answer to this question, the Bible suddenly made sense.

So, what's the answer? Well, it's in the verses. I want to highlight a repeated refrain from the passage in Luke to show what Jesus is teaching. Notice what Jesus says three separate times in this passage. I will remove the variables to show you the formula that Jesus is using here.

Verse 26 says, "If anyone... does not... he cannot be My disciple."

Verse 27 says, "And whoever does not ... cannot be My disciple."

Verse 33 says, "whoever of you does not ... cannot be My disciple."

Three different times in this passage Jesus says that if you don't do a particular something you can't be His disciple. Discipleship is in focus in this section, which should get our attention. He is giving the conditions for being a disciple. This is the pothole into which many teachers often stumble. Many Bible readers have mistakenly thought and taught that salvation and discipleship are the same thing. Still others teach that discipleship automatically results from true salvation. Neither of these really answer the question, how could it be both free and costly.

Here is the big reveal. This one idea will change the way you see the entire Bible, if you let it.

Discipleship and salvation are not the same thing.

Read that phrase over and over if you have to. Get it into your mind. If you think that discipleship and salvation are different words for the same thing, then you are like millions of others who have been sold a muddled version of the gospel.

The point of this chapter and this book is not to convince you to reject either of these. In fact, the premiere experience for the Christian is to embrace both salvation and discipleship as two critical aspects of a saved and abundant life. Those who have assumed that discipleship and salvation

are the same thing are missing out on a greater experience. Likewise, those who assume that discipleship will automatically result from salvation have also misunderstood the division between these two important messages. Stay tuned; there is lots more in store.

If you find yourself resisting this idea, that salvation and discipleship are two different concepts, I understand. I resisted it for nearly six months before I finally saw the light. I had been frustrated for years by the illogical nature of gospel presentations. I knew in the rational side of my brain that something was wrong with my understanding of the gospel. Even then, it took me half a year to let go of my old broken understanding.

If this is a new concept for you, I hope you will stick with me. We have an exciting voyage to go on together. Even if you have misgivings about what has already been said, I'm convinced that you will find the following chapters valuable as you seek to understand the Bible. It's vital to understand the clear distinction between salvation and discipleship. When you don't, it's possible you will miss out on both.

TWO:

W A T E R A N D F O O D

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In the famous encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar, we see a very clear division between Salvation and Discipleship. In chapter 4 of John, in which this story occurs, two metaphors are used to illustrate these concepts.

Salvation is illustrated by water in John 4:7-14. The narrative then shifts to discuss discipleship with the metaphor of food in the following section, John 4:28-36. The fact that these two metaphors, water for salvation and food for discipleship, are so close together allows us to see the relationship between them while maintaining a clear division.

Take a moment to read John 4:7-14 and discover how Jesus uses the metaphor of water to illustrate the free gift of everlasting life.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked

Him, and He would have given you living water.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” [1](#)

There are a few things to notice about this section. Jesus teaches us, as he taught the woman, that salvation comes by faith in him alone. Observe what he says to the woman in verse ten.

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” [2](#)

Although this is not the only place in which Jesus tells us how to gain everlasting life, he lays out a very valuable definition of faith. First, he says that we need to know the gift. Second, we need to know the giver. Third, we need to want the gift. Jesus goes on to define this concept as "belief." In his famous explanation of salvation in John 3:16, he says that "whoever believes in Him [Jesus] has everlasting life.” [3](#)

So belief in Jesus for everlasting life includes this incredibly simple set of criteria. You have to believe that everlasting life is available, and you have to believe that Jesus is the giver of everlasting life. When you believe in Him for everlasting life, you get it as a free gift that you can't earn, return, or lose. Notice how he puts it in the verses that follow:

But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” [4](#)

Here we learn two important things. First, we discover that drinking the water is a metaphor for gaining everlasting life. Second, we find out that once we have the gift of Jesus, everlasting life, it lasts forever. We know this because He says that he will "never thirst" and then uses the word

"everlasting." You can hardly get more clear than that. Taken altogether, drinking the water is a metaphor for salvation.

As we read on in chapter 4 of John, we find that the focus shifts from salvation to discipleship. In this discipleship section, the metaphor of food is used to show some key aspects. Read John 4:28-36 to see how food illustrates the characteristics of discipleship:

The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Then they went out of the city and came to Him. In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work. Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors." [5](#)

Did you notice the shift here? Now that He's speaking to his disciples, who had already believed in Him, He speaks of food. When He was speaking to the unbelieving woman, He spoke of water. It's important to see that He doesn't speak of water to His disciples, just as He did not speak of food to the woman. What is the food that He is talking about? He says:

My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work. [6](#)

Jesus is talking about work. He's talking about accomplishing the duties that were given to Him by his father. Since salvation is a gift, it doesn't come as a result of our works. The fact that Jesus has shifted to a discussion about the work at hand shows that the switch has been toggled. In other words, He is now talking about discipleship. It's not only He who is expected to work but His disciples as well.

I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.” [7](#)

What work is He talking about? The woman with whom Jesus talked went into town and began to evangelize it. She invited the villagers to come see the one she believed was the Messiah. Jesus claims that the disciples were about to reap a harvest from someone else's work. Whose work? The woman's. She was sowing the seed in the village, and the inhabitants were currently making their way toward Jesus and His disciples. They were about to reap the harvest of her labor.

By this, we see that Jesus expects His disciples to do the same kind of work that He is doing. However, He does not say that this work will win them eternal life. No one is going to get saved from Hell by doing this kind of work. Instead, He says:

And he who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. [8](#)

It would be easy to miss the distinction here, and certainly many have. Remember that He already explained how to receive eternal life to the woman at the well. We now find that He is explaining how to "receive wages, and gather fruit *FOR* eternal life." Emphasis added.

As we consider water and food, we should begin to see the difference coming into focus. Salvation is a free gift that the woman received by believing in Jesus. The woman then rushed into town to tell all of the villagers about Jesus. She became saved, and then a moment later began to do work. Already, the woman was sowing seed which would result in rewards that she would enjoy during her eternal life. The disciples too were about to reap the harvest that the woman prepared, and they would also enjoy the rewards of that harvest in eternal life. The woman was already showing signs of discipleship. Any disciples, even today, who do God's work will be rewarded by both the harvest and will rejoice when they arrive in Heaven.

We find, by this, that discipleship has its own reward, apart from the gift of salvation. The one who endures as a disciple will have the "food" that Jesus talked about. That food is to do the will of the Father and to accomplish His work. This food is incredibly rewarding to eat, both in this

life and in the life to come. The finest meal you've ever tasted does not compare to the food that Jesus spoke of.

Have you ever thought of yourself as Jesus' employee? Here he is saying that your everlasting life is a free gift. The level or lack of discipleship that you decide to work at cannot jeopardize your everlasting life, but it can enhance it. If you work hard as a disciple, you will be repaid for your hard work. You can't have more or less salvation. You either have it or you don't. However, Jesus shows that you can have more or less discipleship, which will result in more or less reward in Heaven.

In this section, we discovered that salvation is the free gift of everlasting life, represented by water. We then discovered that discipleship is the work we do for the Lord after we are believers, as represented by food. Salvation results in everlasting life; whereas discipleship is about action and results in a reward for those who work.

THREE:

B ELIEVE I N J ESUS AS S AVIOR ,
AND O BEY J ESUS AS L ORD

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I have often heard people use the phrase, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior." This is a legitimate way to express one's relationship to Jesus. However, the phrase can be misleading if it's not understood in context. I have heard more than one over-zealous pastor try to usher new converts into the kingdom by claiming that they need to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. At one time this seemed to me to be the crux of the gospel, but now this phraseology makes me cringe. It warps the saving message of Jesus until it is no longer recognizable. The problem is that cliché takes the requirements for discipleship and salvation and lumps them together.

As we try to understand the distinction between salvation and discipleship, this is a phrase that needs to be examined. It contains both a declaration of salvation and a declaration of discipleship, although most who use it may not realize its dual nature.

So what does it mean to believe in Jesus as savior? We don't have to guess. In fact, John chapter four gives us a great example of a group of people who believed in Jesus as savior. After Jesus shared the gospel with

the woman at the well in Sychar, she went into the village and evangelized it. The people came out to meet Jesus and convinced him to stay there a few days. He continued to teach them. Now, read John 4:41-42 to see this excellent example of a group who believed in Jesus as savior.

And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” ¹

There is no question about it. These people got saved. They received everlasting life the moment that they believed in Jesus. How do we know that? We know it because John is incredibly consistent throughout his gospel. He points out that whoever believes in Jesus has everlasting life. ² The phrasing he uses to describe salvation is "believe in." So we know these people just became believers and received eternal salvation. To say otherwise is to contradict everything that the Gospel of John teaches.

So what exactly did the people of Sychar believe? As we mentioned in the last chapter, they believed that Jesus was the giver of everlasting life, and they believed that he was offering it to them. They wanted everlasting life and therefore believed in him for it. All of this is encapsulated in the term, *Christ*. They understood that the Christ was the one who gives everlasting life and specifically was the one who would bring about the future resurrection. ³

So declaring that they believe Jesus to be the Christ shows that they had already believed and received everlasting life. Now they use an interesting synonym for the word “Christ.” Do you see it?

...we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” ⁴

They used the phrase, ‘Savior of the world’ as a synonym for *the Christ*. They were saved by believing Jesus was the Christ, and since they used ‘Savior of the world’ as a synonym, that means they were saved by believing that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

That is significant to us because ‘Savior’ is a much more common word than ‘Christ.’ In fact, most people probably assume that Christ was Jesus’

last name. It was a title that conferred on him the equivalent of world savior.

Therefore, believing in Jesus as Savior is a salvation issue, obviously. Someone can believe in Jesus as savior to gain everlasting life, provided that they believe in the gift of everlasting life, and that the giver is Jesus. If that is what is understood and believed when someone believes in Jesus as Savior— then great— they are saved.

Here comes the twist, though. What about the first part of the phrase, "Jesus is my Lord *and Savior* "?

When we say that Jesus is our Lord what does that mean? Once again, we don't have to guess. Jesus told us plainly what it *should* mean. Jesus says it this way:

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say? [5](#)

Jesus points out that if someone calls him Lord, it implies that they should be committed to obedience. Calling Jesus ‘Lord’ means that we should obey him as Lord. This brings up a vital question. Does someone have to obey Jesus as Lord to be saved?

There is no shortage of pastors and teachers who say that we must obey Jesus as Lord in order to have salvation. In fact, I recently received a message from a young man struggling with this very issue. His church teaches that obedience to Christ is a requirement for salvation and they use Matthew 28:19-20 to back up that claim. Ironically that is one of the exact verses that best illustrates how obeying Jesus' as Lord fits into the Christian life. Read this familiar passage from Matthew 28:19-20:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*” [6](#)

By now you should be getting accustomed to our trigger words ‘salvation’ and ‘discipleship.’ Do you see either of those words in the passage above? It's not hard to find. It opens with,

Go therefore and make disciples [7](#)

Everything that follows this phrase is a description of how to make disciples. Jesus was sending out His students to teach what they had learned. His instructions show that the ultimate goal of ministry is bringing believers into discipleship. Basically, He is showing us that the successful disciple is the one who obeys Jesus as Lord. Yet, the question remains unanswered. Is there any indication that obeying Jesus' as Lord is required to be saved?

Nope! Clearly, he expects individuals to first believe in Him for everlasting life before they undertake discipleship. It's a given that discipleship is for believers who have counted the cost, [8](#) and decide to follow Jesus on a daily basis. However, nowhere in this passage, or anywhere in the Bible, does it say that discipleship can earn a person their salvation. It doesn't say that discipleship can maintain a person's salvation either.

This verse is showing us what to do with people once they get saved. Turning someone into a disciple can't get them saved, and it isn't a method to keep them saved either. It's not even an indicator if they are saved. There is nothing like that in any of these verses.

Of course, discipleship is the ultimate goal for believers, but there is no indication from any verse that it is required for everlasting life. If there were, we would have to stop teaching that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. On the contrary, the gospel would be much more clear if others would stop teaching that salvation and discipleship are the same. Jesus didn't teach that, and his disciples didn't believe it.

The mission of disciple-making is two-fold, according to the verses previously mentioned.

“...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” [9](#)

First, a believer is to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism shows that the person has believed in Jesus as Savior at a previous point. Baptism, being the first step of discipleship, is then to be followed by a journey of learning and doing.

“...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;” [10](#)

The life of discipleship is one in which the disciple is taught to observe everything that Jesus' commanded. Anyone who mistakes this for the plan of salvation is teaching a work-for-salvation gospel. By this, we understand that obeying Jesus as Lord is a vital part of a disciple's life, but it is not what is required to be saved. Knowing that there is a distinction between salvation and discipleship helps us to see that, while the ultimate goal of every believer should be reaching maturity in Christ, not all operate at the same level of obedience, and possibly some don't obey at all.

Salvation requires us to believe in Jesus as Savior. Discipleship requires us to obey Jesus as Lord. These two are separate decisions. If someone says, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior," hopefully what they mean is, "I'm saved by faith, and I'm a disciple by choice." Believing in Jesus as Savior and obeying Him as Lord is the most rewarding experience a human can have in this life and the next.

FOUR: FAITH AND WORKS

SEE THE VIDEO AT:
SIMPLYBELIEF.COM/SD4

A few years ago I joined a ministry called 289 DESIGN. As you might guess, the name comes from Ephesians 2:8-9. Our mission is to produce materials that share the clear message of God's grace with the world. If you've read it before, you know there is hardly any verse in the Bible that is as transparent about the inner workings of grace as Ephesians 2:8-9. Over the past few years, I've had a lot of time to think about those few verses and what they mean for the believer.

Those who claim salvation and discipleship as one and the same will often avoid this verse. Paul sets out a stark contrast between salvation and what follows, discipleship. He uses the words “*faith*” and “*works*” to etch that difference in stone. He attaches faith to the salvation experience while he attaches works to the experience of discipleship. Take a look at the following verses in Ephesians 2:8-9 as we consider the first of these two ideas, faith:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹

How could it be any more clear? By grace, you have been saved. Grace means unmerited favor. Right out of the gate Paul's word choice shows us that salvation is not deserved. He's going to reiterate that idea a few words later.

He goes on to say that we are saved by grace through faith. It could be said that grace is the gift, while faith is the mechanism. Faith or belief in Jesus is the only condition that must be fulfilled by a person to receive this grace. ²

In case that wasn't clear enough, he reminds us that it is "not of yourselves but the gift of God." Although it's a little redundant, he seems adamant about getting the point across. He doesn't want anyone to mistakenly think that they earned the gift of salvation. That's why I like to say it can't be earned, returned, or lost. It's not a gift if it can be earned. He then goes on to repeat this idea from another angle.

Paul says, "not of works." Is it sinking in yet? It's a free gift. It can't be earned. It can't be worked for. It's not a gift you give to yourself, but it's from God. He then wraps up the idea with this: "Lest anyone should boast." Just in case we missed the half dozen times he's clarified, he wants to add that we can't boast about salvation since it is not from our merit or work. Salvation is a free gift given to those who have believed in Jesus. It's plain and simple. So faith is a salvation issue.

I used to wonder, "If salvation is a free gift by faith, why does Jesus give so many instructions in the New Testament?" At that time in my life, I would have answered it by saying, "Salvation is free, but we have to *PROVE* we have it by doing good works." Even then, that bothered me. I was no philosopher, but I could see that the logic was broken. If salvation is a free gift given to those who have faith in Jesus, but they have to do good works to prove they have it, then that means good works are required for salvation. Some have tried to do intellectual acrobatics to make the two fit together, but it always bothered me until I realized that salvation and discipleship are two separate things.

Paul uses the word 'faith' in reference to salvation, but then he turns around in the next verse and uses 'works.' By now, I bet you can guess why. That's right; he immediately jumps from talking about salvation in verse eight and nine to talking about discipleship in verse ten. The shift is so sudden that many have failed to notice it. It would be easy to lump it all together and call it salvation, but that would confuse the whole message.

Read the verse that immediately follows what we just looked at in Ephesians 2:10:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. [3](#)

Notice that this verse starts with the word, "For." That means he is connecting this verse to the last few. He just finished telling us that salvation is a free gift for those who have faith in Jesus. Now he is going to tell us what should come next: discipleship.

Who is he talking about here when he says, "we are His..."? He wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus. He's talking to believers (plural), specifically the church. So the church was created in Christ, as he puts it, to do good works. The church is a do-gooder organization. It does what it's supposed to be doing when it is full of people working. Work is a discipleship issue, not a salvation issue. So the church performs its God-given purpose when it's full of committed working disciples.

It's easy to think the church is just here to lead you in some worship music and teach you a little about the Bible. That's valuable stuff, but the purpose of the church, and in general, disciples, is to do good works. Jesus created the church to do stuff that He wanted to be accomplished in the world, and He created you to be part of that mission.

If someone gains salvation but then decides to abandon discipleship, they are missing out on a great adventure. They are narrowing their horizons so drastically that it could be said that they are not doing what they were created to do. On an individual level we are created to be disciples, and in a corporate sense, the church is created to do good works. Once again, we see that discipleship is the ultimate goal for believers and the church. The church wouldn't work if it were only full of saved people who don't pursue discipleship. In the life of any local congregation, as the number of lazy believers grows the effectiveness of that body decreases. The church functions well when the highest percentage of saved people are also working for Christ.

Notice this phrase once more:

... Good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. [4](#)

Although it may feel as if we dreamed it up, the good we do as disciples is something God planned in advance for us to do. For example, my father-in-law started 289 DESIGN, the ministry I am working with right now. Even though it felt like it was his idea, if it is a good work, and I think it is, it was planned by God beforehand. No matter what kind of good work you decide to do as a disciple, it was God's idea. That's a humbling thought. Nothing good originates with us, but it was in the heart of God beforehand for it to be accomplished.

Now imagine the believer who has received salvation by faith. He has that free gift; it can never be returned or lost. What if that same believer decides to neglect his own discipleship? Rather than chase the kingdom of God and pursue good works, he squanders his time and resources. Think of all the good works that God could have led him to do. Think of all the good works that God would have prepared for him to do had he been willing. What a tremendous sadness it is to miss out on discipleship. Salvation through faith is an incredibly valuable gift. How much more valuable it is when a saved person also pursues discipleship.

FIVE:

G RACE AND W ORKS

SEE THE VIDEO AT:
SIMPLYBELIEF.COM/SD5

As a kid, one of my biggest choices was between orange juice and milk. Out of boyish curiosity, I once mixed milk and orange juice together. I stirred it with excitement, thinking I had come up with the ultimate breakfast drink. As I timidly tried the new flavor I found that the mixture was no longer milk, and it was no longer orange juice, but a strange concoction that I couldn't stand to drink. In a similar way, we find a warning from Paul against mixing grace and works.

Certainly, there are some who have tried to make his simple words mean something else, but Paul says it so clearly that a child could understand the lesson. As we saw in the previous chapter, salvation is by grace. With that in mind, look at how Paul puts this poignant idea together in Romans 11:6.

And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. ¹

Paul strikes a sharp contrast between grace and works. We have already seen that the word 'grace' is inextricably tied to salvation. The word 'works'

is unarguably connected to discipleship. Paul teaches us here that we must not mix the two into one. If we try to gain salvation by doing work then what we have is not grace. If we try to accomplish discipleship by grace then what we have will not work.

We are expected to have both grace and works, but we are not supposed to store them in the same container. You wouldn't store your salt in the same jar as your sugar, or your honey in the same jar as your vinegar. Paul teaches us that we must keep these two, grace and works, separate. Both are part of a fulfilling Christian life, but if they get mixed the result is as useless as sugar-salt, honey-vinegar, or orange-milk.

To keep them separate we must understand that we are saved by grace, and we are disciples by hard work. We are not saved by doing the work of discipleship, and we are not disciples by grace. That means that our discipleship does not automatically continue just because we have grace. In other words, salvation is by grace, but discipleship is not by grace.

Discipleship begins the same moment that we receive our salvation, but it is either rejected, neglected, or maintained. Discipleship is a daily choice and will involve costs, sacrifices, and rewards. As long as we keep this distinction clear, we won't have to live with a useless grace-works concoction.

SIX:

**R ELATIONSHIP W ITH G OD AND F
ELLOWSHIP W ITH G OD**

SEE THE VIDEO AT:
SIMPLYBELIEF.COM/SD6

In my youth, I attended countless evangelistic events. Often it was explained that I should strive to have a relationship with God. When the evangelist tried to explain how to have a relationship with God, the message would usually get muddled. He would start by saying that salvation is a free gift. He would then say that salvation comes by a relationship with God. After that, he would explain what a relationship with God looked like. It invariably included reading your Bible, praying, and going to church. That description of "a relationship with God" was contradictory to the message that "salvation is free." Even at a young age, I saw this contradiction and often sought to understand.

This illustration expresses a common confusion between a relationship with God and fellowship with God. A relationship is not the same thing as fellowship. That brings us to the topic of this chapter. What the evangelist got right is that we need a relationship with God. Our salvation is based on our relationship to God. However, the level of our discipleship determines our fellowship with God.

So what is the difference between a relationship and fellowship with God? It's the same distinction we've been discussing since page one. A relationship with God begins the moment one receives salvation. However, fellowship with God is maintained through discipleship.

Let's take a look at John 1:12 which will give us a description of the fundamental relationship with God that we must have to be saved:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: [1](#)

What does it mean to be a child? The word "child" implies a relationship with a parent. Are there good parent-child relationships? Yep. Are there bad ones as well? Of course. If I ever hear someone say, "He is my biological father," that usually clues me into the fact that their relationship may not be so great. They do, however, still have a relationship even if it's an estranged one.

In a similar way, salvation makes God our spiritual Father, but it's not a given that the relationship will be a close one. To be a child of God is to be saved. However, not everyone's relationship with God is warm. In fact, some saved people have estranged relationships with God. They are certainly saved, but their relationship may be strained.

The above verse tells us how one receives this child status. The verse says it three times in three different ways. Each of these signifies the same event:

1. Receive Him [Jesus]
2. Become children of God
3. Believe in His name

Each of these represents the same relationship to God. To "believe in His name" is a familiar phrase and is used over and over to signify that someone has salvation. So having a relationship with God, receiving Jesus, and believing in His name are all synonyms for having salvation.

You can see now how the evangelist I mentioned in the opening illustration slipped up. He implied that all people who are "truly saved" will have a good relationship with God. That's like saying you can only be a

person's biological child if the relationship between child and parent is good. That's ridiculous, and it's not what the Gospel of John teaches.

We have already mentioned that fellowship is a discipleship issue and not a requirement for salvation. However, what is fellowship? To get a clue let's take a look at 1 John 1:3:

that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. [2](#)

The same author wrote these verses and the previous passage. In 1 John we find that the purpose of the letter is to teach believers how to have a closeness with God. John wants to show people who have a relationship with God how to make that relationship a good one, which he calls fellowship. Ultimately he wants to teach saved people about a critical aspect of discipleship, which is fellowship with God.

It should be said that these verses are not talking about how to be saved since he's sharing them with people who already have salvation. He explains the most important step in fellowship with God just a few verses later:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [3](#)

Now that we know the context, we should quickly see that this verse is not explaining how to have salvation, as many have taught. Instead, it's about how to be close to God. The key is the confession of sins.

Confession is not a requirement for salvation because salvation comes by faith alone in Christ alone. [4](#) However, if you want to have fellowship with God; if you want to be close to Him, you are expected to confess your sins.

I'd like you to notice an interesting aspect of the verse above. It says that if we confess our sins, which means if we confess the sins we are aware of, He will forgive us of ALL of our unrighteousness. So the path to fellowship with God is not one in which I have to confess perfectly. There are certainly sins that I've committed of which I am unaware. However, if I confess the ones I know about to the best of my ability, He will also forgive the rest.

You may be thinking, “Now wait a minute. I thought God already forgave my sins? Why do I have to confess?” He forgave all of your sins in order for you to be saved. Regarding judgment and salvation, you're forgiven, but we're not talking about judgment and salvation here, remember? We're talking about fellowship. To have a basic relationship with God is to be saved. However, you need to confess daily sins, if you want fellowship with God.

You could think of it like a marriage. My wife committed to sticking by my side until I'm dust in the ground. She made that commitment knowing that I would sometimes offend her, and sometimes upset her, and sometimes let her down. By committing to be married for life, she promised to accept my shortcomings and stay together, none-the-less. So positionally, I'm forgiven even before I hurt her feelings. My position will continue to be, husband.

Even though my position is always going to be husband, does that mean I will never have to apologize, and maybe even ask for forgiveness? Obviously, even though she's committed to forgiving me in the general sense, it would do tremendous damage to our fellowship as a couple if to spite her I trimmed her hair while she was sleeping. I would absolutely need to confess, apologize, and beg for forgiveness. Otherwise, our fellowship would be in the dumps. We'd still be married, but we would lose our closeness, for sure. I would be made to sleep in another room, and all scissors would be hidden out of my reach. A relationship can be damaged without being broken.

In spite of my appalling behavior, I'm confident that we could stay married since she is such a loyal person but the relationship would be dreadful. If I want a good relationship, I have to work at it. In that case, I should confess to her any offenses I've committed and work hard to overcome them.

In a similar way, when we confess our sins to God, we are not seeking the kind of forgiveness that is needed on judgment day. That is already in place because Jesus has bestowed on us everlasting life. He's promised that life to everyone who believes. Jesus has committed to never allow the relationship to end, but He doesn't promise perpetual fellowship. That takes work. If we want a good relationship with God, we had better confess and obey.

In this light, you can see that a relationship with God is what we have when we gain salvation. However, fellowship with God is the result of discipleship. Fellowship is hard work sometimes, but it's well worth it. We are not saved because of the quality of our fellowship with God, but we are fulfilled by it. If you want not only a relationship with God, but fellowship with Him, then do what John says, and confess.

SEVEN:

BORN AGAIN AND GROW

SEE THE VIDEO AT:
SIMPLYBELIEF.COM/SD7

I don't remember the day I was born, but my mother tells me it was an event to remember. Once I was born, I could never go back. It was a done deal, a one-time event, an irreversible transaction. It is likely for that reason that Jesus used birth to illustrate what happens the moment someone believes in Him for everlasting life. In a conversation with one of the religious elite, Jesus once said:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ¹

No doubt, you've heard the term “born again” if you've been around believers at all. Being born again is the term Jesus used to describe the conversion experience. He clarifies his words only a few verses later.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ²

Jesus is explaining that there are two births that people can experience. The flesh or physical birth is one that everyone alive has experienced. Then there is a spiritual birth, which is what he's talking about when he says, "born again." Nick, the man who he was talking to, didn't understand what Jesus meant by being born again. So Jesus goes on to explain. In his explanation, we find the most famous verse in the entire Bible, John 3:16. Did you catch that? John 3:16 is a description of how to be born again. Here's how he put it:

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. [3](#)

So anyone who believes in Jesus for everlasting life becomes born again. The Greek word that we get "again" from can either be translated "again" or "from above." Both meanings fit the context. [4](#) Jesus makes it clear that this new birth is something a person is not able to achieve on their own because it's a birth from above. It's Jesus' work, not ours that makes us able to be born anew.

To enter the Kingdom of God, which is a synonym for "go to Heaven," one must be born again/from above. Only those who experience the new birth by believing in Jesus will make it to Heaven. There are other places in the New Testament where John uses a very similar term.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God... [5](#)

Here the same author explains that it is faith alone which makes it possible to be born of God. Therefore, salvation comes by faith alone and can be illustrated as a new birth. It probably doesn't surprise anyone that being born again is about salvation since the term is almost always used to describe that. However, spiritual growth is sometimes offered as a proof of new birth or even mixed up within the concept of new birth. This is what we will examine next.

Does a child have to grow up to prove that they were physically born? Obviously not. The growth of a child is independent from their birthday. The birth happens in a moment of time, but the growth that a kid will experience continues for years to come. If a child is growing, it can be assumed that he was born. However, if a child is not growing properly it

would be ridiculous to use that as proof that he was never born. Growth is a separate issue from salvation. Some will grow fast, some slow, and some not at all. We see the potential for varied spiritual growth patterns in these words of Peter:

[A]s newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. [6](#)

We learn a few things about growth in this verse. First of all, everyone who is born again should desire to grow. As a baby grows by drinking milk, a newborn believer should grow by consuming the word of God. It's important to notice what the verse does not say. It does not say that a baby will automatically grow. There is a condition to be met for growth to occur. In the same way that my newborn son would not grow if my wife and I refused to feed him his daily helping of milk, a baby believer will stifle their growth opportunity if they don't feed on the word of God. It's important to remember that spiritual life lasts forever. Unlike a baby who is in danger of death if he doesn't eat, a spiritual new born can never die since spiritual life, once given, lasts forever. However, an infant believer can choose not to grow by neglecting the word of God.

Secondly, the fact that Peter has to tell believers to do this lets us know that the growth is not automatic. Many have claimed that a person who becomes born again will automatically grow into a mature Christian, but if that were the case why is the Bible so packed with instructions on growing? In fact, as we will see in the final chapter, virtually all of the Bible is devoted to helping, encouraging, and instructing the believer to grow. That's a lot of wasted pages if the growth is going to happen automatically. The natural conclusion is that spiritual growth is not automatic. Not only does the New Testament talk about the first phase of growth from spiritual birth, but it also talks about become grown ups.

that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the

effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. [2](#)

The goal is not to grow only a little and then stop. Our physical bodies are amazing creations which, if given proper nutrients, will grow up to maturity. Beyond that, hopefully, we never stop growing in knowledge and wisdom. These verses demonstrate that God has a plan for our lives in which we continue to develop and grow in our walk of faith.

Once again, the fact that Paul is instructing them to, “no longer be children,” lets us know that it’s a possibility to remain infantile. It is within the realm of reason that a believer’s growth could either be stunted or nonexistent if he or she neglects to focus on it.

All of this points to a simple conclusion. Growth is about discipleship. Discipleship is a long term process in which we continue to mature toward the likeness of Christ. The level of maturity that we attain in this lifetime is determined by our commitment to discipleship.

In this chapter, we learned that birth and growth are two separate things. Being born again is about salvation, and growing is about discipleship. The one condition we must fulfill for new birth to occur is that we believe in Jesus. Faith in Christ alone brings about a spiritual birth which Jesus’s work enables. However, once we are born anew, we have the opportunity to grow by feeding on God’s word, making Godly decisions, and speaking the truth in love. This process of growth is called discipleship.

EIGHT: CHILD OF GOD AND FRIEND OF GOD

**SEE THE VIDEO AT:
SIMPLYBELIEF.COM/SD8**

I used to travel and play music with a worship band when I was in college. We were doing an event in the Dallas area one summer. Usually, we would play for a half hour, and then the speaker would deliver his message. We had a set of songs that we often played, including one called, "I Am a Friend of God." After we completed our set, the speaker immediately called the lyrics of that song into question:

"You're only a friend of God if you do what He says." He was right to point out that the song had no mention of discipleship or works. In fact, the song didn't even mention salvation. It just said, "I am a friend of God. He calls me friend." Misunderstanding who God calls friends can lead to a confusion of the entire gospel. In this chapter, we will contrast the difference between being a child of God and a friend of God.

As we have shown in the last two chapters, being a child of God is a salvation issue. Here is what John 1:12 says:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: [1](#)

So, clearly, being a child of God is the status of all those who have salvation. However, does that automatically make the saved person a friend of God? Nope.

Being a child of God is about salvation but being a friend of God is about discipleship. We know this because the conditions for being a friend of God are different from the condition for gaining eternal life. In speaking to His disciples, Jesus said it this way:

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. [2](#)

Not much clarification is needed. He puts it plainly when He says, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." It might be said that friendship with Jesus is a little different from human friendships. I wouldn't expect absolute submission from my earthly friends. However, friendship with Jesus requires obedience. Why?; because Jesus is going to be King of the world. Those who wish to have a close relationship with Him must obey Him as Lord. This is another way of saying they must be on the path of discipleship. Anyone who rejects or neglects discipleship is denying their potential friendship with Jesus, and therefore God. James puts it in the strongest terms possible when he explains how to be a friend with or enemy of God, in chapter 4 of his letter.

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [3](#)

No one wants God as an enemy. James makes it plain, only a few verses earlier, that he's talking to immature Christians. He reiterates this a verse later, as well, when he confirms that the spirit dwells within them collectively. So, indeed, he's talking to believers who are saved.

You may find it surprising to see that someone who is saved can become an enemy of God. This does not constitute a loss of salvation, but a loss of discipleship and the benefits that come with it. James' words echo what Jesus said when he declared, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." James adds that we are His enemies if we don't.

A person who is saved has a choice. They can either be an enemy of God, or they can be a friend of God. How sad it is that there are many people who are saved, and will certainly be in Heaven, but have made no effort to be His friend.

When we understand that all it takes to have salvation is faith in Jesus, but it takes obedience to be His friend, the Bible begins to come alive. Saved people have clear instructions to get busy, and by doing so, we will be His friend. Being a child of God is about salvation. Being a friend of God is about discipleship.

NINE:

**B ELIEVE IN C HRIST AND L OVE C
HRIST**

SEE THE VIDEO AT:
SIMPLYBELIEF.COM/SD9

In this chapter we are going to look at the difference between the two phrases, believe in Christ and love Christ. This issue is the exact one that changed my life. The moment I understood “believing in Jesus” is different from “loving Jesus”, the Bible suddenly started making sense.

I grew up in an academically-minded Bible Church. We studied the Bible like our lives depended on it. Even with that rigorous research mentality, I totally missed this vital distinction between believing and loving. Whether others misunderstood or not, I do not know, but I assumed that believing in Jesus and loving Jesus were simply two ways to say the same thing.

I went to Bible college and didn't catch the distinction. I was in church ministry for nearly a decade, studying the Bible and teaching every week and I still didn't see the difference. Originally it was my wife who pointed it out, while we were still dating. I wrestled with the idea for a few months, but the light finally came on while attending a Bible Conference in Dallas in 2009.

A great Bible teacher gave a talk that stirred my guts like a boiling soup. I rushed up afterward to ask this simple question:

"Can someone believe in Jesus but not love Him?" I said, as if my hair was on fire. The answer to that question changed the course of my life. His simple, "yes," was almost unheard, because I already knew the answer. The light had already dawned, and there was no way to put the sun back below the horizon. Once I stepped into the brilliance, I could never go back.

Believing in Christ is about salvation. We learn the simple plan of salvation by belief in Jesus in the third chapter of John.

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. [1](#)

Much ado has been made about this verse, and you should be able to see why. If this verse encapsulates the entirety of the salvation plan, then popular evangelists and TV preachers have some explaining to do. If someone can have everlasting life by believing in Jesus, which is a synonym for faith alone, then why do evangelists give a five, six, or seven-step plan to get saved?

The answer is that most, even those slick haired pulpit pounders have mixed the message of salvation with the message of discipleship and made the whole thing a muddy mess.

As you can see from the above verse, which hardly needs to be explained, eternal life comes by believing in Jesus. There are loads of other verses in the Gospel of John that say essentially the same thing. [2](#) Most also incorporate the term 'Christ.' So, to believe in Christ is the way to salvation. However, what does it mean to love Christ?

We don't have to guess; in fact, Jesus tells us in the plainest way possible in John 14:15-21.

"If you love Me, keep My commandments... He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." [3](#)

In this chapter, Jesus is talking to His disciples who had already believed in Him for everlasting life. It's interesting that He waited until Judas left to

give this speech since Judas was not a believer ⁴and was not saved. ⁵ Apparently, this message is not for unbelievers. To love Christ is not an expectation we should place on the unsaved. In fact, it's my opinion that we do a disservice to the effectiveness of evangelism if we try to convince someone to love Jesus before they believe in Him. Jesus shows that you can't love Him unless you obey Him, and unbelievers can't obey God's law. ⁶So, it's impossible for an unbeliever to love Jesus, or in His words, 'keep My commandments; this is likely why the Bible calls unbelievers “enemies of God.” ⁷Telling someone they need to love God is not an instruction that leads to salvation, but to discipleship.

All this leads us to this very simple point: loving Jesus is what disciples do. Obedience to Jesus is love for him. We, therefore, are not saved by loving Jesus. We are saved by faith alone, but our love for Jesus comes alongside our discipleship. As we grow in our ability to obey Him, we show that we love Him.

TEN:

K NOW G OD AND K NOW G OD

SEE THE VIDEO AT:
SIMPLYBELIEF.COM/SD10

Imagine you and a friend go to lunch. Your friend begins to tell you about a certain celebrity who is well known throughout the world. At some point she says to you, “do you know him?”

“I know him,” you reply.

With that single phrase, “I know him,” you could mean at least four different things. You may mean one of the following:

1. You are aware of his existence.
2. You are familiar with his work.
3. You have met him before.
4. You are close friends.

So the word, "know" can have a range of meanings. I have often explained my relationship to a new acquaintance as, “I know him but I don't *know* him.” Maybe it's because of my limited vocabulary that I can't think of a word other than "know" to describe two different levels of relationship.

It's not just modern English that demonstrates this phenomenon. The Bible uses the word, "know" to describe a range of meanings as well. In fact, to "know God" is sometimes used to mean salvation, and at other times used to mean discipleship. It is the context of the verse that clues us in to the particular meaning. Let's look at this verse in John 17:3:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. [1](#)

These words appear in Jesus' famous prayer before his crucifixion. There could hardly be a question as to what this verse is referring to. It speaks of "knowing" in terms of salvation. In the context of this verse, to know God and Jesus, is to be saved. How do we know that? It's a verse about salvation because it opens with the line,

And this is eternal life... [2](#)

In the gospel of John, eternal life refers to the free gift that God offers to all those who believe in his son. That this verse is describing the salvation experience is irrefutable.

However, the word "know" is not always applied to the salvation experience. In fact, in the same gospel John uses the word differently. In chapter fourteen Jesus is having a private question and answer session with his disciples. It is an intimate discussion where Jesus is delivering some troubling news. Jesus also makes the claim that whoever has known him has known the Father. Philip is confused and asks for Jesus to reveal the Father to them. Jesus responds in John 14:9:

Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? [3](#)

Notice that Jesus uses the concept of knowing the Father and the Son here, but it is not in the same sense as the verse we previously looked at. Jesus is speaking to his disciples, and by this point all the disciples but Judas [4](#) were believers. [5](#) Jesus was responding to Philip, a saved believer, when he said that he hadn't known him or the Father. It would be easy to

think of this as a contradiction if we don't remember that "know" can have a range of meanings.

In the same way that I might say, "I knew my great grandmother, but I didn't *really* know her." I mean to say I met her once, but I was not familiar with her. In fact, I wouldn't even recognize my own great grandmother if we passed on the street. Jesus is saying a similar thing to Philip. Something to the effect of, "You're not on a familiar basis with God, because you don't recognize him sitting right here in front of you."

This shows us that it's possible to know God in the salvation sense, but not be well acquainted with him because our discipleship efforts are lacking. The context of the verse is indispensable in finding out whether the author is talking about salvation or discipleship. Here is another great example from 1 John 2:3.

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. [6](#)

John, the same writer of the above verses, let's us see what kind of "know" he is talking about in 1 John by these types of statements. The following of commandments is not about salvation since salvation is a free gift. So this verse proves itself to be about discipleship. Knowing him, in 1 John is about our obedience.

We also see the double layered cake here when John says,

...we know that we know Him. [7](#)

He uses the word twice back-to-back. If I claimed to know a famous person, someone might challenge me by asking, "Do you know him? Or do you **know** know him?" We sometimes make double use of a word to signify intensity or quality. John seems to be doing something similar here. He's not talking about casual acquaintance knowledge, but instead a familiarity, fellowship, a **know** know kind of relationship. This fits with the overall theme of 1 John, which focuses on the mature believer's fellowship with God. [8](#)

That means that 1 John 2:3 is certainly speaking of discipleship. Here is another great one from 1 John:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. [9](#)

What type of "know" is John talking about here? There are a handful of clues that make it clear. First, he opens these verses by calling his readers "Beloved." He's writing to believers, and not only that but believers who have a loving fellowship. 1 John is addressed to a spiritually mature and growing audience. Our next clue comes when he says:

...everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [10](#)

Notice that he didn't say, "Everyone born of God loves," But only that "everyone who loves is born of God, and knows him." In other words, not all saved people will love and know God, but all people who love and know God are able to do so because they are born-again.

It's important that we don't try to turn this into an external test for who is saved and who is not. That's because there are saved people who don't love and even others who pretend to be loving but are not. [11](#)

What's even more telling is that John divides the ideas "born of God," and "know God." Born of God is certainly a reference to salvation. [12](#) If born of God means salvation, then what does knowing God mean in this context? It must be something other than salvation. Certainly it is a reference to discipleship. He goes on to say:

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. [13](#)

Which kind of "know" might he mean by this? Many have claimed that he means it is impossible to have salvation if we do not love God. However, the Gospel of John, the Bible's evangelistic gospel, never says that we must love God to be saved. It's believing in Jesus that allows us to have everlasting life, not the quality of our love. Unbelievers are enemies, not lovers of God, [14](#) and therefore no one could ever get saved if loving God were the requirement. Love is not a condition for salvation, but it is a condition for being well-acquainted with God.

He never says that all those who are saved will love God, and never implies that love for God is automatic. He simply shows that saved people

are able, which is why only those who have been born-again can love God.

Salvation allows the opportunity for someone to engage in discipleship. It is not, however, their salvation that is in view when John says, "Know God," it's their discipleship.

In this chapter we've learned that context is the key to understanding which term is meant when "knowing God" is in question. Sometimes John meant salvation, and other times he meant discipleship. Being aware of the Biblical landscape will allow you to steer clear of most of the misinterpretations that come from not knowing which "knowing" John was talking about.

ELEVEN:

**F AITH IN C HRIST FOR E
VERLASTING L IFE AND F AITH I N
C HRIST FOR D AILY L IFE**

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I have a little shop behind my house where I keep my tools. My collection of tools is not very extensive. In fact, most of them were given to me by my dad, and my father-in-law. Consequently, I don't always have the exact tool needed for any particular project.

Because of this I have learned an important lesson. You can use the same tool to do many different things. I have used screwdrivers to chisel, a hammer to dig, and a shovel as an axe. In each of these situations, I found that the dual-use tool came in very handy.

In a similar way we find that faith is like a multi-use tool. If you were to ask someone why they have faith in Jesus, they would likely answer, "To be saved." So having faith in Christ for everlasting life is the most well-known purpose of faith. That's what we find in John 6:47 when it says:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. [1](#)

“Believe” and “faith” are the same Greek word. So the above verse is clearly talking about salvation. However, did you know that faith has another very important purpose? This multi-use tool can also be used for daily living. We can see the contrast between faith for everlasting life, and faith for daily living in Galatians 2:20 when Paul says:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. [2](#)

In this verse we see that faith has two purposes and each is unique from its counterpart. One result of faith in Christ is salvation. We see that purpose in the first line when he says:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; [3](#)

Paul is describing here what took place the moment he believed in Jesus. He took on the life of Christ the moment he believed in Jesus for salvation. This was done by faith for everlasting life. However, he goes on to explain another function of faith in the next line:

and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. [4](#)

Here he acknowledges that he is still alive and struggling physically. Although, his spiritual identity has been replaced by the life of Christ on the inside, he still has to live out a fleshly existence. Although Christ’s life emanates from the core of who he is, there is still a physical nature which needs to be addressed.

This is where the second purpose of faith in Christ comes in. His daily life in the flesh requires faith as well. It’s important that we don’t confuse this with faith for everlasting life. He already believed in Christ, so that transaction is complete. However, his every day life now must be lived ‘by faith.’

This confused me for years until I realized the difference between faith for salvation and faith for daily living. I might illustrate it this way. Let's say there is a health club in my town. It's free to join as long as I agree with their mission statement. I read through it and find that it is very simple. Their mission statement says, "Salad is healthier than ice cream." I can easily agree with the statement. So I now believe that salad is better for me than ice cream. I have faith alone in salad, which gained me free membership in this health club. However faith alone won't make me lose weight. If I want to get healthy I need to 'eat by faith.' I need to act on my faith if I want results. In a similar way faith alone gains us salvation, acting on faith makes us disciples. We have free membership in the kingdom of Heaven by faith alone, but if we want to get spiritually fit and ready for our entrance we need to not only have faith for salvation, but 'live by faith.'

Many people have confused faith alone, for faith at work. Being saved through faith requires no action. Yet, faith for daily life is all about acting on one's belief and conviction. We need to see the clear divide between these two faiths in order to understand the distinction between salvation and discipleship.

The verses that come before and after this one in Galatians reiterate that salvation comes, not by works, the law, or good deeds. However, as long as we live in these broken flesh bodies, we need to live by faith if we want to be committed disciples. Faith in Christ for everlasting life is a one time event. Living by faith will hopefully extend for the rest of our lives.

We find that not everyone is able to live by faith all the time, though. In the opener to this section in Galatians we find that the Apostle Peter was not currently living by faith. Galatians 2:20 is part of a rebuke to Peter for his lack of practical daily faith. Peter had shunned a group of believers in order to play favorites with another. Paul saw the hypocrisy and called him out publicly. Was Paul saying that Peter was not saved? Obviously not. That idea would be ridiculous. Instead he was telling him to course correct and get back to a place where he lives by faith.

As you can see, living by faith is not an automatic aspect of being saved, but it is a requirement for being a disciple. Faith in Christ for everlasting life and faith in Christ for daily life are two separate things. One is salvation, the other is discipleship.

TWELVE:

B ELIEVE IN C HRIST AND A BIDE

IN C HRIST

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When I was six years old, my parents took my brothers and me to an amusement park for a special Christmas event called "Holiday in the Park." My dad's instructions were very basic, "stay with me." He knew that if we wandered off, we would not have a good time, and could get ourselves hurt. I stuck by my dad's side all day long, and even into the evening.

Once it got dark, the holiday lights came on, and it became much harder to stay with my dad. Not only was the park packed with people, but there was so much to look at with the park lit up like a Christmas tree.

My memory of how we got separated is vague, but I do recall standing near a park bench alone crying. I had not followed my father's instructions to "stay with me." Whether it was an accident or not, I don't remember, but one thing is for sure: I was lost, scared, and no longer having a good time. I could see my steamy breath rolling over my lips with each sob. I should have paid more attention and stayed with Dad.

Jesus told those who believed in him a very similar thing when he said, "Abide in Me." The word 'abide' is often translated 'remain' or 'stay.' What

does it mean to 'abide in Christ'? In this chapter, we will study the difference between 'believe in Christ' and 'abide in Christ.'

Let's take a quick look at what it means to believe in Christ. We've covered this already, but John 3:18 gives us another concise look at what happens for those who believe in Jesus.

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [1](#)

Jesus tells Nicodemus that if one desires to avoid condemnation, he must believe in Jesus. We laid out in previous chapters what it means to believe. If you believe Jesus can and will give you everlasting life, before you can even ask, you have it.

We knew that much, but John 3:18 raises the stakes. Jesus explains that for anyone who doesn't believe, there is already condemnation waiting. There is virtually no way to overstate the severity of the situation. Judgment and punishment await the human race, and the only hope for escape is to believe in the Son of God, Jesus.

Now that we have established what it means to believe, let's look at 'abide.' There are a handful of places which Jesus tells believers to 'abide.' What does it mean to abide, and how is that different from believing? Our first stop on our way to that answer is John 8:30:

As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. [2](#)

Jesus was giving a talk to a group of Jews. Part of the audience became believers while they were listening to Jesus. They didn't pray a prayer or walk an aisle. They just believed. Jesus Himself acknowledges that anyone who believes in Him has everlasting life. So these people who believed in Him got saved right there on the spot. In the next verse, Jesus addresses those new believers. He gives instructions to this group who just got born-again.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” [3](#)

There is hardly a clearer verse in the Bible that demonstrates the division between salvation and discipleship. Jesus, in talking to a group of new believers, says clearly that there is a next step. Now that their salvation is in place, they need to 'abide' in His word. This is not so different from my dad saying, "stay with me" at the theme park.

We've seen this 'abide' word before. In John chapter four Jesus was interacting with another group of new believers when it says:

So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to *stay* with them; and He *stayed* there two days. [4](#)

Notice the words "stay" and "stayed" in the verse above. They are the same Greek word that Jesus uses when he says "'Abide' in my word." So Jesus is not using some unfamiliar religiously ambiguous term. When Jesus says, "Abide in my word," he's saying, "*Stay with me*," or, "*keep doing what I teach*," or maybe even, "*don't wander off*."

He then explains what the benefit of abiding in his word will be. He says,

"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." [5](#)

The result of abiding in Jesus' word is discipleship. Not only is He offering genuine discipleship to those who abide, but He goes on to promise truth and freedom. From this verse, we see that abiding and discipleship are not automatic outcomes of salvation since Jesus has to tell them to do it. If discipleship were automatic, then Jesus would have just said, "*You are my disciples now*." However, we find that for them to be His disciples, indeed, they must abide, stay, or remain. Like a coach, He's telling these new believers to stick with it because there will be a great reward for those who do. At least two of the rewards of discipleship are truth and freedom.

The non-believing Jews who heard Him talking to the new believers chime in and claim that they don't need freedom. Jesus then defines freedom and explains what it means to abide in this way.

Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. [6](#)

He uses the analogy of a house to explain what he means by abiding. Slaves will often take any opportunity to run away. They are not likely to abide with a household where they are an unwilling servant. On the other hand, if someone is a son in a household, he stays. A son would be in line to inherit the house and would not consider himself a slave there. For that reason, a son will abide where a slave will not.

So who does the "son who stays" and "slave who leaves" represent? We don't have to guess because Jesus tells us. Anyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. So the slave who leaves is the one who can't stay with Jesus; he can't continually follow His teaching because sin has too strong of a hold on his life. Now remember, He's talking about believers here, so a saved person has everlasting life, but if they don't work at abiding in Christ, then sin will drive them away from fellowship with Christ. He's not talking about a loss of salvation. He's talking about a loss of freedom, truth, and discipleship. So the slave, in the analogy, is the saved person who chooses not to be a disciple.

The son who stays, in the analogy, is the one who daily chooses to be a disciple. The one who abides fights off sin in his life as he stays in Christ. His salvation is not dependent on his ability to abide, but his reward in this life and the next is. Therefore, abiding in Christ is all about discipleship.

Jesus uses another parable to explain what it means 'to abide' in these words found in John 15:5:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. [7](#)

Many zealous Bible teachers have claimed that if you don't abide in Christ, you will lose your salvation. However, that's not what Jesus says here. He says that there is a consequence for the one who doesn't abide and it's like the branch that falls off the vine. There is a negative outcome for the one who does not choose discipleship, but it's not a loss of salvation. For the one who rejects or neglects discipleship Jesus says:

...for without Me you can do nothing. [8](#)

His salvation will be intact, but he will live a life accomplishing nothing of value for Jesus. Since this is the opposite of what the verse calls us to do, it means that the one who doesn't abide will bear no fruit. Are we saved because we bear fruit? No, we are not; we are saved by grace through faith. [9](#) However, we abide if we want to bear fruit. Paul makes it clear that there are saved people who will not abide in Christ. These non-abiding Christians will do nothing of value. One day they will have to give an account before Jesus for the time and spiritual resources they wasted. Paul is talking about the non-abiding believer when he says:

...he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. [10](#)

Evidently, a person can be saved apart from abiding in Christ. That's because we are not saved by works. However, if we want a better reception on the day we stand before Jesus, we need to abide, which will allow us to produce fruit. We will be saved by grace, but rewarded for the fruit.

In case you're still unclear on what it means to abide in Christ, John lays it out in very simple terms in 1 John 3:24. He says:

Now he who keeps His [Jesus] commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. [11](#)

Abiding in Christ is about works. It's about following the commandments of Jesus. If we intend to be disciples, we must abide in Christ. It's not just a dry command, but in fact, comes with some expectations. A quick read through John 15 reveals that there are many benefits and even some consequences of abiding in Christ.

Those who abide in Christ will:

become disciples. [12](#)

become Jesus' friend. [13](#)

bear much fruit. [14](#)

have answered prayers. [15](#)

glorify God. [16](#)
have the joy of Jesus. [17](#)
know the plans of God. [18](#)
be hated by the world. [19](#)
be persecuted by the world. [20](#)

The above benefits encourage us to take those steps of discipleship and abide in Christ. The consequences remind us why Jesus said we should count the cost before we engage. He's not promising that it will be easy, but He does promise that we will have His help.

To believe in Christ is salvation. To abide in Christ is discipleship. The clear distinction between these two ideas gives us an astounding confidence that those who believe are saved, but those who believe and abide are saved and rewarded. Salvation determines where you will spend eternity. Discipleship determines how you will spend eternity.

THIRTEEN:
E TERNAL L IFE AND E TERNAL L
IFE A BIDDING

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Anyone who believes in Jesus has everlasting life. That life is not given at some point in the distant future, but at the moment at which the person believes. Believing in Jesus is a one-time event that gives the born-again believer a gift which cannot be earned, returned, or lost. Those who claim that salvation can be lost have either misunderstood when salvation is given or how long it lasts. If you ask the average Christian, most would confidently reply that it happens when a person dies. However, that's not what Jesus says. Notice how he words the experience of salvation in John 3:36:

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” ¹

If you didn't catch it, look again at the present tense verb, *has*. He affirms that the one who believes currently has everlasting life. If someone currently has something that lasts forever how long will they have it? It

seems silly that we should have to ask such a simple-minded question. Yet, the truth has become so blinded by confusion that many think everlasting life is not everlasting. If it's received when he believes, it must start at that moment and last for eternity. Otherwise, Jesus should not have called it everlasting life, but instead temporary life.

This is the amazing gift that God has given all those who have believed. Everlasting life. Certainly there has never been such a tremendous gift presented to the world.

All who have believed in Jesus for everlasting life are absolutely and eternally saved. There is nothing that can remove the gift of God since it is Jesus who is the guarantor of that gift. However, in speaking to a group of believers, the Apostle John says this in 1 John 3:15:

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. [2](#)

At first glance, it seems as if everything that we said about everlasting life has been undone by this simple phrase. John seems to be saying that anyone who has hate in his heart and mind toward another human being is unsaved. Thus the converse would seem to be true as well, that only those who love their brothers are saved.

This creates a problem since all of the salvation verses that we've looked at do not say that loving a brother is a condition for gaining everlasting life. It's true that Jesus commanded all disciples to love one another, [3](#) but he did not say that anyone's salvation was dependent upon their ability to love. So, what is John getting at here? What does he mean by saying that eternal life does not abide in the one who hates?

The answer is connected to the word *abide*. John uses the word abide in a specific way in both his gospel and his letters. See the previous chapter for a more thorough look at what it means to abide in Christ. A little extra context will help us understand what John is trying to teach us. Notice what he says only a few verses earlier:

He who does not love his brother abides in death. [4](#)

Remember that abide is often translated as, stay or remain. John points out that the world is full of hate and suffers the consequence of death as a

result. The believer has this amazing opportunity to leave a life of death-consequences behind. However, the believer who hates is choosing to remain in the midst of death and its influence. He has been given everlasting life, and has the means to leave but instead he chooses to stay.

So John is setting up this contrast between what a hate-filled believer does, and what he ought to do. This amazing opportunity to come into the light and leave the shackles of death behind is expressed by John in the same verse when he says:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. [5](#)

It's not salvation which is in view here, but instead the choice of a believer who wants to leave the hate-filled life behind with all of its trappings of death. Crossing from death to life presents a beautiful image of a believer who chooses to release his hate and forgive his fellow brethren.

It's almost as if he is speaking of two separate locations in which a believer can decide to live. A saved person can choose to abide in the place of death by being hateful, or they can choose to abide in the place of life by being loving. Either way they have salvation, but one choice is clearly superior. With that description in view, let's look once more at the verse in question.

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. [6](#)

If a believer chooses to abide in the place of hate and death, he does that against the wishes of Jesus. A saved person who hates, chooses that on his own, by himself, alone. However, there is an interesting swap when a believer chooses to abide in Christ. John changes the wording to reflect that the abiding believer is not just abiding in eternal life, but instead eternal life is abiding in the believer. This harkens back to Jesus' famous words when He said,

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. [7](#)

Jesus explains that if you choose the path of abiding, you won't be alone in that decisions. He shows that it's not just the believer who abides in Christ, but it's Christ who abides in the believer as long as the believer chooses to stay. Although it may not be easy, Jesus promises to work with us to strengthen our ability to remain in Him. The fact that John says eternal life can abide in us is not surprising especially when you consider that he calls Jesus by the name *Eternal Life* at the end of this same letter. [8](#)

The believer can either choose to abide in Christ or not. When the believer chooses to abide, he becomes a disciple and there are expectations placed on disciples. Discipleship requires that he remove hate from his life. As that happens he crosses over from the place of hate and death to the place of Christ, the giver of eternal life. All of this leads us to this simple point. Having eternal life abiding inside is a discipleship term. The believer will be saved regardless of his decisions to allow eternal life to abide within. For all those who choose the life of discipleship and seek to have eternal life abide inside, the reward will be great in this life and the next.

FOURTEEN:

**W H I T E T H R O N E J U D G M E N T A N D
T H E J U D G M E N T S E A T O F C
H R I S T**

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There is good news for all believers in Christ. You won't have to appear before Jesus at the final judgment. We know this because Jesus issued a pass when he said:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. [1](#)

He lets us know that as long as we have believed in him, we are excused from the final judgment. The final judgment is the last event that the world will see before everything is made new. It's a good thing that we've been pardoned from the proceedings of the high court of the King of Kings because it is not going to be a pleasant occasion for those who appear before him.

In this chapter we are going to compare two of the judgments that the Bible tells us about. Many may not realize that the Great White Throne Judgement and the Judgement Seat of Christ represent separate events for different groups of people. Let's start by looking at what the Bible has to say about the White Throne judgement in Revelation 20:10:

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. [2](#)

This is the preamble to the White Throne judgment. It sets the stakes, so that we know what the consequences are for those who have to stand before the White Throne of the King of Kings. The narrative goes on with these words:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. [3](#)

A White Throne comes into John's vision, and on it one who sits. In the ancient world, the sight of a king on his throne often meant that he would judge cases of high importance. However, this is no ordinary king. John makes a point to tell us that the earth and heavens fled away from his face. It's not completely clear what is meant by this, but the event that follows the White Throne judgement is the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. So, it seems that this appearing of the King of Kings on his White Throne tears the universe apart. Imagine how terrifying it will be for those who have to stand before him and give an account, especially considering that he just ripped up the cosmos like an old piece of paper. The narrative continues to unfold as we meet more characters:

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. [4](#)

Judgement time has arrived. This verse tells us the method and measure by which the judgment will be performed. There are separate books that are referenced in this judgement. It says first, “books [plural] were opened.” There is also a single book opened which carries the title, the Book of Life. John then makes it clear that it is the plural books which are referenced for this judgment. The people who stand before Jesus at this time will be “judged based on their works.” This tells us what appears in the plural books. They are a collection of volumes which recount every action each person has ever done whether good or bad. For the sake of simplicity, we will call the plural books, the books of works. So we know what the books of works are but what is the Book of Life? We will find out shortly. Let’s read on:

The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. [5](#)

John clarifies who they are that will be judged and how they arrived. The mass of humanity that stands before the White Throne are those who had previously been residing in what we might think of as a holding tank for the dead. There is some distinction given to the sea, death, and Hades. Regardless of how these are distinct from each other, one thing is for sure, it is unbelievers who are resurrected for this event. John uses the word *dead* to mean unbelievers in another place when he is explaining this coming judgment. [6](#)

When unbelievers throughout history have died, they’ve been held in a kind of temporary prison. You could think of it as the short-term jail that an accused criminal waits in before he stands trial. Jesus talked about this holding place for the dead in his lesson about the rich man and Lazarus. [7](#)

When the White Throne judgment arrives these temporary prisons for the dead spit out everyone they had been holding. This represents the event that Jesus promised when he said one day everyone who has ever lived would be bodily resurrected, some of whom would experience a “resurrection of condemnation.” [8](#) In the final act of this judgment narrative we find the outcome of the White Throne judgment for all those who were brought back to life:

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. [9](#)

The outcome for those who stand trial on that day will not be good. They will be thrown into the lake of fire. Now, there are a few important things that we need to notice. The previous verses tell us that these unbelievers are judged based on their works; however, here it tells us that they were thrown into the lake of fire if their names were not found written in the Book of Life. It's not the books of works that determine if they get thrown into the lake of fire. It is whether their names are in the Book of Life. So while they were judged based on their works, no one's works were good enough to justify their gaining entrance into God's eternal Kingdom. After all Paul said, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight." [10](#)

If these people had only believed in Jesus, they would have been given everlasting life. In fact, that is exactly what the Book of Life represents. The Book of Life is a list of names containing all those who have been born again by faith in the savior. [11](#)

While the Book of Life will determine where those judged will spend eternity, the books of works will be used to determine how they will spend eternity. As you might already know, not everyone's experience in the lake of fire will be identical. In fact, Jesus describes some people's experience in Hell as "more tolerable." [12](#) So the books of works, will be used as Jesus determines who will have a more tolerable eternal experience in the lake of fire. Regardless of tolerability, this judgment will be a terrible day for those who appear before the White Throne. None will pass this judgment without being thrown into the lake of fire.

Aren't you glad that believers get to skip this judgment, as Jesus promised? [13](#) I know I am. I can't imagine how horrible that day will be for those who refused God's gift of everlasting life.

Now that we have a picture of the White Throne judgment, it's time to consider another judgement that Paul calls the Judgment Seat of Christ. Whereas the White Throne judgment is only for unbelievers destined for the lake of fire, we find that the judgment seat of Christ is only for believers destined for Heaven. Here is what Paul says about it in 2 Corinthians 5:10:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. [14](#)

Paul shows us here that believers too, must appear before the judgment of Jesus. In the previous section, though, Jesus promised that those who believe would not “come under judgment.” [15](#) How do we harmonize these two ideas? Simple. The White Throne judgment and the Judgment Seat of Christ are two different events for different groups with very different outcomes. When Jesus promised believers would not come under judgment, he was talking about the final judgment as can be seen by the context in which the promise appears.

So what is the Judgment Seat of Christ? We actually have a really good picture of what it will be like because Paul uses a specific Greek word to describe it. The words that we translate into “judgment seat” is a single Greek word, *bēma*. The *bēma* was a platform in Greek towns where decisions were handed down by rulers. It also referred to a place where rewards were presented in athletic games. The champions received laurels from an official who sat on the *bēma*. [16](#) Therefore, the Judgment Seat of Christ represents both a chance of rebuke, and an opportunity for reward. This is quite different from what we learned about the White Throne judgment indeed.

Paul gives us this look at the event in which believers will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ:

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 as through fire. [17](#)

He uses a very helpful building analogy to make it plain for us to understand. He starts by explaining that the foundation is Jesus Christ. That’s important to us for a few reasons. First, it means that this judgment will only focus on the works that are done after someone becomes a

believer. I got saved when I was six years old, so virtually all of my life will have to be accounted for when I stand before the Judgement Seat. There are others who became believers later in life, who will have fewer years that they must account for. It's good news that we only have to account for our years as believers, since most are least proud of their pre-Christian lifestyle.

Secondly, we discover that since the foundation is Jesus, we need not worry about a loss of salvation. Have you ever seen a house with a concrete slab, burned to the ground? The neighborhood I grew up in used to have one. Everything was completely consumed by the fire except the foundation. We would ride our bikes on the concrete slab, which was all that remained after the fire.

The fact that it's Jesus who is the foundation should give us comfort that no matter what happens at the Judgment Seat, we will be saved. The minimum you can walk away with is your everlasting life. However, we discover that many will walk away with much more.

He goes on to explain that we are able to build on top of the foundation of Jesus. Once you become a believer you begin the work. This is work that only saved people can do. There are different building materials available for this construction project. All believers have access to gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and straw. The building materials represent the actions that you take during your life post-belief. Your decision to either be a committed disciple, or a sin-chasing Christian is how you decide what building materials you use. What you build with is up to you.

So, by the time you and I take our last breath we have built something. Clearly, some people's constructions will be better than others. In fact, there are those who built almost entirely with good works, represented by gold. On the other hand, there will be those who built almost entirely with cheap materials like straw. What comes next should get you motivated.

Paul tells us that this judgment will be like a fire sweeping through the building you've made. It's as if Jesus is throwing a metaphorical match into your construction site. If you've built with gold, silver, and precious stones, then you can breath easy. Your building will stand the test of fire. What's awesome here is that those whose metaphorical buildings are still standing after the fire will get a reward. The more left standing the more reward.

We must understand that reward is not eternal life. Reward is not salvation. Eternal life is a gift, remember? A reward is like being paid for the construction work we will have performed. He assesses the fire-

resistance of your building and the most worthy builders get the most reward. Reward is above and beyond salvation. That's why reward is always attached to discipleship. We are not rewarded by grace, we are saved by grace. Conversely, we are not saved for our works, we are rewarded for works.

Paul finishes the analogy with this powerful warning, something that motivated him to live well. He tells us that there will be those whose construction site is completely burned down to its foundation. The foundation can't burn, but everything on top will be absolutely scorched. What happens to the person who got saved but then only built with useless materials, which represent unimportant or even bad works? If you come from a traditional background like I did, you might assume that Jesus will get so mad that he revokes that person's salvation. However, that is not what Paul says. He puts it this way:

If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. [18](#)

Notice the words, "he will be saved." So it is possible to be a saved person, but have nothing to show for it when you enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It's possible for a Christian to bear no fruit. It's even possible for the believer to work hard for a while, but then stop working. For the ones who have fewer or no works there will be fewer or no rewards.

There are those who will "suffer loss," in Heaven. Those are his words, not mine. The first time I encountered this idea, suffering loss in heaven, it startled me. I had been taught that everyone will be equal in heaven. However, that is not the case. There are those who will gain great reward in Heaven, for their work on Earth. Their eternal experience will be much better than the saved person with no reward. There are others who will have no reward in Heaven for their lack of work on Earth. Their experience will not be nearly as great as those who received a reward for their works.

We can see even more clearly the division between salvation and discipleship. Those that believe in Jesus for salvation will absolutely be saved. Those who believe and work, will be saved and rewarded. That's what motivated me to write this little rhyming phrase that I've used so often.

In Christ believers have believed.
Disciples have believed and obeyed.
For the believer, salvation is received.
While, disciples are both rewarded and saved.

FIFTEEN:

E TERNAL L IFE AND E TERNAL R

EWARDS

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Imagine that you've just completed a month of work and are waiting for your pay check. The boss hands you an envelope with your wages and says, "Here's your free gift." Why would that be the wrong thing for the boss to say? Obviously, your wages are not a gift. If they were a gift you should have been allowed to sit on your couch watching TV all month. Instead you worked, and you are receiving a reward for your labor.

Among Bible enthusiasts there are many who remain confused about the difference between eternal life and eternal rewards. Although, hardly anyone misunderstands the difference between a birthday present and a paycheck. When we see the terms used to describe salvation and discipleship, it should become clear which is which. The two verses that we will examine in this section appear in the the same chapter of the Bible. Let's look at what Revelation 22:17 has to say about salvation:

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the

water of life freely. ¹

These words of Jesus invite anyone who desires to have everlasting life to come and receive it. He lays out clearly in the gospel of John what is required to have everlasting life. The person who is willing need only believe in Christ for eternal life and they will have it. ² These verses from Revelation are reminiscent of the discussion Jesus had with the woman at the well, when he said a very similar thing. ³

What stands out about this verse most sharply is that he offers this gift freely. Some translations render it, “without cost.” The Christ has the right and the means to give away this free gift of salvation. There is hardly any way to misunderstand the price attached to eternal life when this verse and all of the other salvation passages are taken together.

That’s why the one who is confused about the difference between salvation and discipleship might trip over Revelation 22:12. Notice that this verse is in the same chapter as the one we just looked at:

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.” ⁴

Verse 12 and 17 are separated by only a short paragraph, but they are so unique from one another that there is virtually no way to see them as saying the same thing. Here we find that Christ, on his return, will give rewards based on work. The nature of a reward is inequality. Just like wages for work, the reward that Jesus will give is based on the obedience of those whom He will reward. Since everyone operates at a different level of obedience, Christ’s reward will be different for each person.

Most importantly, we know that he can’t be talking about salvation when he says he is coming with his reward, because we know that salvation is not given as a result of our work. ⁵ Instead, its reward that is given for our work.

Any honest person should be able to admit that Jesus is offering both a free gift, and a reward for work. Of course, a free gift is not the same thing as a reward. So, Jesus is giving two distinct offers in Revelation 22. It’s important to see that this dual offer is in the last chapter, and in fact, ends the book. Revelation was the final book to be written and included in the Bible, so this offer of free eternal life, and a reward for work is the end cap

of the entire Biblical narrative. It's as if He's saying, "Just in case you've missed it, let Me remind you one last time before I go."

As we consider how these two offers fit with the concepts of salvation and discipleship, everything becomes clear. Salvation is linked to eternal life, whereas eternal reward is linked to discipleship. Salvation is a free gift, but discipleship is work, and there will be a reward for those who choose it.

SIXTEEN:

E T E R N A L L I F E A S A G I F T A N D E
T E R N A L L I F E A S A R E W A R D

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In this chapter we are going to compare the concept of gaining eternal life as a gift and getting eternal life as a reward. Don't be alarmed. Although these seem as if they are contradictory ideas, the distinction will become plain as we go along.

The first verse that we will consider is this one in Romans 6:23:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹

Paul, in that verse, cleverly tells us that eternal life is a gift that comes from God and is given in Christ Jesus our Lord. For the believer the experience of salvation comes at no cost. ² The free gift of eternal life is given at the moment someone believes. If you are a believer you currently have everlasting life. ³

However, there are a handful of passages in the Bible that use reward terminology to talk about the *future* experience of eternal life. The

distinction between eternal life as a current possession and a future experience should be noted because it will be important as we continue. Let's consider Mark 10:29-30 as an example:

Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” [4](#)

In these verses, Jesus is explaining the reward of being a committed disciple. It's important that we notice the heavily used language of discipleship and reward. He gives a set of cause and effect statements, starting with the concept that sacrifice will be rewarded both in this life and the next. The entire section is laden with reward terminology.

So, why then, does he say that someone will receive eternal life, in the midst of this speech about reward? If we were simply scanning it would be easy to miss the distinction. Many have used passages like this to say that salvation comes as a result of the believer's sacrifice. We know that can't be what he's saying since it contradicts his own words many times over. There must be another explanation, and in fact there is.

When we look at the section in which these verses appear, the answer jumps out. These words of Jesus follow the encounter with the rich young ruler.

“[S]ell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me. [5](#)”

Notice Jesus doesn't say to the rich young ruler that the outcome of selling everything would be salvation. Instead he says that the outcome would be treasure in heaven. Despite Jesus' efforts the rich young ruler left sad. The man wasn't looking for a savior, he was looking for a system.

After the young ruler leaves, Peter asks about something Jesus said. Jesus had mentioned treasure in heaven, which apparently caught Peter's ear.

Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we [the disciples] have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” [6](#)

By this time, all the disciples except Judas had already believed in Jesus for everlasting life. Peter had already expressed that belief, [7](#) so he was saved at this point. Peter, no doubt, noticed that Jesus had just told the rich young ruler that one could leave his earthly wealth to gain heavenly riches. He, and the other disciples, had already left their possessions behind. Now he was hearing that there was treasure in heaven to be had, and he was in line to receive some of it. Peter wanted to know what that treasure would be.

Peter’s question is the springboard for the verses that we quoted at the top of this chapter. Let’s look at them once more, with this new understanding:

Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” [8](#)

The sense in which he means these words is focused on rewards. He’s pointing out that the future experience in eternal life will be a great one for those who are willing to sacrifice now. In this passage, when he says eternal life, he’s connecting it to his previous explanation of treasure in heaven and eternal reward. The current possession of eternal life is a gift given to those who believe in Christ. However, the future experience of an ultimately fulfilling eternal life has to be worked for as disciples.

There is another verse that talks of eternal life as a reward in a very similar way. Paul, in his first letter to his disciple Timothy, said this:

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life... [9](#) storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. [10](#)

Once again, the sense in which Paul means, “lay hold on eternal life,” is very close to what Jesus said in Mark 10. You’ll notice that here, like in the previous verses, he’s not talking about the current possession of eternal life, but a future experience. That is the first clue that we are not talking about salvation but discipleship.

Here he uses athletic terms that might be used of a boxer. This “laying hold on eternal life” involves agonizing work that must be done to gain that future experience. For Paul this fight was the fight of discipleship, in which there is agony and pain, but reward as well.

Notice his words, “storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come...” Once again this indicates that we are talking of work and reward, not salvation. Since the gift of eternal life is gained the moment a person believes and can never be lost. It would make no sense to say that more salvation could be stored up. Instead we understand that what is being stored up is reward that will be enjoyed in the future experience of eternal life.

We know that believers already have a current possession of eternal life. ¹¹ However, Paul means that the greatest experience in the life to come will result from a hard fought spiritual battle. Discipleship is a fight, and it takes a lot of focus and hard work to win. These athletic terms let us know assuredly that Paul is not talking about the free gift of eternal life that every believer currently has, but instead the maximum potential experience that the disciple can experience when they finally come into the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the vast majority of times when the Bible uses “eternal life” it means it in terms of salvation. There are only a handful of times that the Bible uses the term eternal life to express the rewarded experience for discipleship. Here is a simple rule to quickly determine which is being talked about. When eternal life is referred to as a present possession, it is a reference to the gift. When eternal life is referred to as something we will possess in the future, it is a reference to reward.

SEVENTEEN:

E NTER THE K INGDOM AND I

NHERIT THE K INGDOM

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Let's imagine that a certain wealthy father had twins. The brothers grew up together on their family's palatial estate. Once they were old enough to take their own path in life, their father called them together and said, "You will both always be my children, but I would like you each to stay here in my household, manage the household affairs, and inherit this estate one day."

Now let's say that one of the brothers stayed with the father's household to do as he asked. As a result he inherited everything. Meanwhile, the other brother went and traveled the world instead. He would visit only rarely, and grew distant with his father and twin. He was always welcome to enter the house as a visitor, but he inherited nothing in it.

That illustrates the concept that we will be looking at in this chapter. Just like there is a big difference between inheriting a house and entering a house, there is an even bigger difference between entering the kingdom and inheriting it. Let's take a look at our first verse, John 3:3:

... unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. [1](#)

Then in defining what it means to be born again Jesus says:

unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. [2](#)

What follows this in John chapter 3 is the most famous verse of all time. The well known John 3:16, seen as the premiere evangelistic verse, comes as an explanation for what it means to enter the Kingdom of God.

Because Jesus is so crystal clear in John 3 about what is required to gain everlasting life, we don't have to wonder what this means. We know, without a doubt, that entering the kingdom is a synonym for having everlasting life. Since everlasting life is a free gift for all those who believe in Jesus, then entrance into the Kingdom of God is free for all those who believe. Entering the Kingdom is salvation.

Now that we've established that entering the Kingdom of God is about salvation, let's take a look at Galatians 5:19-20:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [3](#)

A casual reading of these verses might send shivers up the spine of the well-meaning Christian. Especially the last line makes it sound as if entrance into the Kingdom of God is not as free as we previously thought. It makes it sound as if only those who obey Jesus perfectly will be allowed in.

Some have proposed that there is leniency in entrance because Paul said, "Those who *practice* such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [4](#)" The word practice is emphasized as if what Paul means is, only those who continue in repetitive sins are barred from entering the Kingdom. However, there's a problem with this interpretation. How much sin is too much to be let into Heaven? After all, is it ok to commit a little murder and adultery, but not too much? Would that person be let into Heaven? The do-gooder

would never know, and therefore never be sure that they are saved. However, the Bible offers assurance of salvation in a number of places. [5](#)

So, emphasizing the word *practice* doesn't get us out of this pickle. Before you start sweating bullets, be calm. The answer is actually more simple than you might think. Understanding this verse does come down to one word, but the word is not practice. What's the word that will clear up the confusion? Inherit.

...those who practice such things will not *inherit* the kingdom of God. [6](#)

Notice the presence of the word "inherit" in the sentence. It's easy to miss it if you haven't been made aware of the difference. The verse doesn't actually mention entering the Kingdom of God at all. It's not talking about salvation, but instead an inheritance of the Kingdom.

As we illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, entering a house and inheriting a house are two very different things. Doesn't it make sense that entering a kingdom and inheriting a kingdom would be separate things as well? In fact, they are. To inherit the Kingdom of God speaks of what Jesus called treasure in heaven. Inheritance is about ownership. Those who have salvation are welcome to come into Heaven, but those who practice discipleship will have ownership in the Kingdom. We can be stakeholders by discipleship. What a wonderful revelation.

In case this is a new concept to you, let's look at another place where Paul defines what he means by the word inheritance.

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. [7](#)

We should thank Paul for being so clear here. By using the word inheritance, he means reward. As we have established in previous chapters, gifts and rewards are not the same thing. Once more, it's clear that he is not talking about the gift of salvation, but reward for hard a working disciple. In fact, he even tells us who will get this reward. He explains that those who serve the Lord, which is a reference to good work done in obedience to Jesus, can expect a reward of inheritance.

The modern definition of inheritance might easily mislead us, for inheritance today is often evenly divided among all the living sons and daughters when a parent dies. That was not the case in the ancient world. In fact, a father would give inheritance unevenly to his children. He would often decide who was most worthy and faithful to inherit and run the family estate when he died. This definition most closely fits what Paul is saying here.

Entering the Kingdom of God is a synonym for salvation. However, for those who take up the mantle of discipleship and remain committed, they will inherit the Kingdom of God. The saved will enter, but disciples will inherit.

EIGHTEEN:

H E I R S O F G O D A N D F E L L O W H

E I R S W I T H C H R I S T

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As we discovered in the previous chapter, there is a difference between entering the Kingdom and inheriting the Kingdom. In this chapter we will discover that there are various types of inheritance. The line of distinction will be drawn between being heirs of God and being co-heirs with Christ. What's the difference between being an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ? Paul lays out these two types of inheritance in the same verse. Let's look at his words in Romans 8:17:

And if we are children, we are also heirs—heirs, on the one hand, of God, and on the other hand, co-heirs with Christ if we suffer together with Him so that we may also be glorified together with Him ¹

We notice two types of inheritance mentioned in this verse, one that children of God will receive, and one that co-heirs with Christ will receive. In the ancient world, every family experienced two types of inheritance as well. All children would generally inherit something, unless the Father

decided to cut them out of the inheritance. However, a first-born son would get a double portion ²of inheritance or sometimes more. From the verses above we learn that every believer is child of God ³and will receive a general inheritance. What is the inheritance that all believers regardless of faithfulness will receive? He gives us a clue in a previous verse. In talking about the transaction that takes place at salvation Paul says:

For you have not received again a spirit of bondage producing fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by means of which we cry out, “Abba, Father!” ⁴

Roman adoption—which could take place at any age—canceled all previous debts and relationships, defining the new son wholly in terms of his new relationship to his father, whose heir he thus became. ⁵Therefore the heirs of God receive forgiveness, are no longer slaves to the law, and are free from the fear of condemnation. All believers are heirs of these things, which is to say that all children of God have salvation. Whereas being an heir of God is equal to being saved, being co-heirs with Christ is something greater.

This is where we draw the line between salvation and discipleship. It is committed disciples who will be co-heirs with Christ. We know that because Paul gives a requirement for being co-heirs. Let’s see what that condition is:

...if we suffer together with Him. ⁶

The condition for being co-heirs with Christ is that we suffer with Him. He tells us in a number of places that discipleship will cost us a great price. Jesus promised that those who choose a life of discipleship will be hated ⁷and persecuted by the world. ⁸However, here He promises that those who are willing to accept that kind of suffering will be His co-heir.

We know it is going to cost us, but what is the benefit of being a co-heir with Christ? The first clue is in the verse.

...so that we may also be glorified together with Him. ⁹

Paul says that co-heirs will be glorified with Christ. [10](#) We find out in another place that Christ humbled himself but will be exalted to the highest place and that everyone everywhere will bow down before him and call him Lord. [11](#) Not only does glory surround Christ but also inheritance. Who is going to have the best inheritance in the Kingdom of God? In the same chapter that Paul tells us we can be co-heirs, he calls Jesus the “first born among many brothers.” [12](#) Calling Jesus “first born” is a way of saying He will have the biggest inheritance in the Kingdom. That means at least a double portion or even more. However, when Paul says we are co-heirs with Christ, he is telling us that Jesus will share that great inheritance with those who suffer with Him. His disciples will get a piece of the pie. We find out that the inheritance that will be shared between Jesus and His disciples will outweigh the suffering by an astronomical margin:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. [13](#)

In other words, suffer with Christ because it is going to be worth it. Everyone who is saved is a child and heir of God. However, those who choose the painful path of discipleship will enjoy the portion of first-born sons. They will be co-heirs with Christ.

NINETEEN:

B LACK D ARKNESS AND D

ARKNESS O UTSIDE

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The most afraid I've ever been was the time I got lost in the woods after dark. My brother and I were out with some youth group friends playing a game of paint ball in the pine forest of East Texas. As a moonless night fell, my heart rate rose. Being surrounded by the blinding dark and knowing there were unseen others in the dark hunting us was a hair-raising experience.

Darkness is often used in the Bible to describe a range of different things. In this chapter we are going to look at two different uses of the concept of darkness. The first use, as we will see, represents eternal condemnation in Hell. Let's take a look at Jude 1:12-13:

...they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are... wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. [1](#)

These verses are discussing the actions and final destiny of a group of unsaved persons. Here it says that the "blackest of darkness" is reserved for

them, and that this blackest of darkness will be an eternal experience. In case we have any doubt that he is talking about the destination of the unsaved in Hell, he clarifies toward the beginning of the chapter:

...the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; ²

This allusion to everlasting chains and once again darkness is referenced for both, unbelievers and fallen angels. Clearly, Jude is using the concept of darkness to illustrate Hell. It's by the grace of God that those who believe in his Son will never have to experience this blackest darkness. Therefore, the black darkness described by Jude, and avoiding it, is a matter of salvation.

However, it's important to know that the Bible doesn't always use darkness as a metaphor for Hell and a call for salvation. In fact, the Gospel of Matthew has a handful of references to darkness, but he is not speaking of Hell.

In this encounter a non-Jewish military man comes to Jesus to ask that his servant be healed. The Roman Centurion demonstrates great faith, even though he is not of the Jewish religion. Jesus is impressed and delivers these amazing words:

“Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ³

Here, Jesus contrasts the faith of a gentile with the lack of faithfulness of some Jews. He teaches that gentiles, those from east and west, will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The image He gives here is one of a banquet or possibly some other honor ceremony in the Kingdom of Heaven. The most important humans who ever lived will be at this feast or ceremony. There will be gentiles there as well, given similar places of honor.

After explaining that, He teaches that the sons of the Kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. Before we define the outer darkness, let's find out what it means to be sons of the kingdom. The title is used by Jesus a few chapters later and He defines the term very clearly. He gives a parable in which he explains that believers will be separated from unbelievers. He uses an agricultural analogy to explain that the good seeds are saved people and weeds (called tares) are not.

...the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. [4](#)

Here we find that the sons of the kingdom are saved. The parable of the wheat and the weeds doesn't indicate how faithful these sons of the kingdom are, only that they have everlasting life.

So, what then does he mean when he says,

But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” [5](#)

Obviously many have assumed that, being cast into outer darkness is a description of being cast into Hell, but that doesn't work with the context.

First notice where this event is taking place.

“...many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” [6](#)

This feast is taking place in the kingdom of heaven. It then says that:

“...But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out...” [7](#)

If I threw you out of my house, doesn't that mean you would have been inside my house first? If they are to be cast out of something, they must first be inside that same something. So what are they inside of before they can be cast out? Well, for one they are inside the kingdom of heaven since that is where the feast is taking place. There is no other way to read it. By that we know that they must be saved because Jesus said that no one will see or enter the kingdom of God unless they are born-again. [8](#)

Now here's a twist that you may not have noticed. It doesn't actually say they are cast out of the kingdom of heaven. The grammar indicates that they are cast out of the feast or ceremony. See how Jesus says,

“...But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into...” [9](#)

He says they are being cast out of one area but *into* another. What is it that they are being cast into? It's called outer darkness. It does not say they are cast out of the kingdom. Instead we see that they are cast into what is defined as, “outer.” It's outer, not out. If I visited the outer edge of the United States, would I still be in the country? Yep. For something to be the outer part, it must still be inside the whole. So, these sons of the kingdom, who are saved, are tossed out of the feast or ceremony but are still inside the kingdom of heaven. We will get more clarity on what the outer darkness is with the next parable that we look at.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

“So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering

where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’

“But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

‘For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ [10](#)

This story focuses on three servants. The servants represent three saved people. Notice that even at the close of the story, the least faithful one is still called “servant” albeit lazy and unprofitable servant. Although they are rewarded differently for their service, none of them ever stops being a servant of their Lord. Even the last reference to the unfaithful one reiterates the master-servant relationship, even though the master is disciplining him.

His master is so upset with him, he ejects him from his house and into the dark. Some have claimed that this could rightly be translated as the darkness outside. The unprofitability of the servant has so enraged his master that he is made to go and sleep outside. His place of comfort inside the house is revoked because he’s been so unfaithful. He’s made to go out and reside where the animals have to sleep. His status is no higher than the beasts who live in the fields around the house. Once the unprofitable servant is out there, he cries in the darkness. He’s full of remorse for his bad behavior. The stories tell us that weeping and gnashing of teeth accompany being shut out into the darkness.

Those that claim the darkness outside is an analogy for Hell might say that only the unsaved will weep and gnash their teeth. However, Jesus wept [11](#), and God gnashed his teeth [12](#), so weeping and gnashing of teeth are not things reserved only for unbelievers, or unsaved. Weeping and gnashing of teeth is an expression of regret and remorse, sometimes even frustration. Why will there be weeping and gnashing of teeth? 1 Corinthians 3:15 tells us that there will be believers who will suffer loss while they are in heaven. The loss they suffer will be missing out on rewards, and fellowship with

Christ because of their lack of diligence during their mortal lives. They will experience regret and frustration at themselves but they will be saved. ¹³

What's more, we know that there will be weeping in the Kingdom of Heaven because it is not until the New Heaven and the New Earth that God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. ¹⁴ That far-future event is the point at which crying will be done away with. For him to wipe away tears then, there must be crying that exists up until that time in order that tears may be wiped away. So, while the Kingdom of God will be a very joy filled place for its citizens, there will still be those who experience regret and even cry in the millennial kingdom of heaven. Weeping in the Kingdom of Heaven will be centered around regret for a lack of faithfulness to Christ while in their mortal bodies. Those who believed in Jesus and were saved but did not choose a life of discipleship will regret it tremendously when Christ comes in His kingdom. They will be barred from the fullest experience in the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is one more reference to the outer darkness, also found in Matthew:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.” ’ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁵

What was the harsher of the punishments that appeared in this above story. The most intense punishment in the parable is the incident in which the king, “sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.” What is the harshest punishment that God will enact against evil unbelievers? Hell is waiting for those who do not believe in Jesus, and is the primary and most severe of the punishments that God will dispense.

There seems to be a dual nature of the king’s punishment. While it likely represents God’s temporal judgments on the nation of Israel, in which armies came against them and burned their cities. It too must represent not only the physical fate of those who refused to believe for salvation, but their eternal fate as well. It must represent both temporal wrath and eternal Hell. If destroying the murderers and burning their city is a reference to Hell, then what does it mean that the poorly dressed man is cast into outer darkness? It must mean something else; something much less severe.

Notice that the man who does not have a wedding garment is not killed. His city is not burned. The army is not employed to hunt him down. In fact, the King calls him “friend,” when he first addresses him. The man is speechless. He would have known that there is a dress code for a royal banquet, and therefore should have been preparing for the feast. Because he doesn’t meet the royal expectation, he is tied up and tossed out of the wedding feast.

There are those who will still try to claim that outer darkness must mean Hell, but even they have to admit that this man is treated with a much less severe punishment than that which the murderers received. Therefore, outer darkness must be something less severe than the most intense punishment which is being condemned to Hell. In fact, as we’ve seen in the previous two examples, it is. Notice that the feast is likely happening at night, since it took all day to get anyone to attend. So the man who was tied and removed from the banquet is being tossed outside in the dark. The king doesn’t revoke his citizenship, kick him out of the Kingdom, or kill him. Instead, he simply removes him from his feast.

Outer darkness suggests a sense in which the one thrown out has to stand outside in the dark. All the while, he knows an incredible banquet is taking place inside. He had the ability to prepare but he chose not to. That this disappointing turn of events produces tears is no surprise.

What we've discovered in this chapter is that Jude spoke of the blackest darkness as an image of Hell. That however, is not the same thing as being thrown into the outer darkness. Jesus spoke of the outer darkness as a dishonored experience in Heaven. This is certainly a reference to a call to discipleship. Therefore, avoiding the blackest darkness is possible only by salvation, where as avoiding the outer darkness is possible by discipleship.

TWENTY:

P OSITIONAL F ORGIVENESS AND D

AILY F ORGIVENESS

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United States Supreme Court justices have what we call life tenure. That means that once they are appointed they will continue to hold their position for life. This is important because justices need to be able to make decisions without the fear of being removed from office. They have positional security, meaning their position won't be taken away from them even if they make an unpopular decision.

Salvation in Christ offers a comparable positional security. Although, in this case, the appointment is not just for our mortal lives, but our eternal ones as well. Therefore, anything having to do with salvation can be discussed with positional terms. Forgiveness is no exception.

In this chapter we will examine the distinction between positional forgiveness, which is what all saved people have; and daily forgiveness which is what disciples should seek on a regular basis. Let's begin by looking at Colossians 1:13:

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. ¹

Do you see the positional terminology in this verse? He's talking to believers when he says, "He... has conveyed us into the kingdom." This speaks of the saved person's irrevocable position. Similar to the Supreme Court appointees, this kingdom position will never be taken from one who has believed in Jesus, no matter what.

He further describes what kind of position we have before God when he says, "...We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." ² So the eternal life tenure position that we hold is one in which we are positionally forgiven. That means that, in terms of judgment and condemnation, we are absolutely forgiven. There is no more that needs to be done in order for our sins to be paid for. We will not stand trial at the final judgment for our sins. ³ They were paid for, once for all sins and for all time. ⁴ We have been made holy once and for all ⁵, and we know it's true because Jesus said before he died, "It is finished." ⁶

This positional forgiveness happens the moment someone believes in Jesus for everlasting life. The Gospel of John, the Bible's evangelistic book, doesn't mention repentance a single time. Therefore, those who place their faith alone in Christ alone are forgiven once and for all even if they don't realize that they are receiving positional forgiveness. This once and for all forgiveness is one of the primary mechanisms that makes eternal life possible, but the person who believes in Jesus for everlasting life may learn only after the fact that they have been forgiven forever. In the same way that a child can ride in a car without understanding how an internal combustion engine works, the one who seeks everlasting life from Christ can have it without understanding what it took for Christ to bestow it. If you are saved, but didn't know you have positional forgiveness, congratulations, now you know.

Now, let's take a look at 1 John 2:12:

I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ⁷

In this letter to believers, he identifies at least some of his readers as “little children.” He goes on to then address “fathers” and “young men.” It seems that he wants his young readers, either physically young or spiritually young, to remember that they have an unbreakable salvation relationship with the father. He adds a reason for his writing. What’s the reason that we are forgiven? It’s for God’s name sake. In other words, It’s not because you earned this positional forgiveness, but instead it was up to God to grant it.

So, positional forgiveness is for all saved people. If one believes in Jesus for everlasting life, they have this irrevocable forgiveness that never fades away. That means that the believer never again has to ask God for the kind of forgiveness that will save them from Hell. However, there is another kind called daily forgiveness.

If we can compare positional forgiveness to the life tenure of a Supreme Court Justice, then daily forgiveness might be compared to the work of a day laborer. Let’s take a look at 1 John 1:9 to find out what daily forgiveness is:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [8](#)

Many have misunderstood this verse in thinking that it sets out a requirement to get saved. I’ve often heard poorly executed gospel presentations that call the new convert to confess his sins and ask for forgiveness in order to have salvation. That is a terrible misunderstanding of what it takes to get saved. Instead, this verse must be seen in the light of what it was intended to be. It’s a tool that a disciple uses to restore fellowship with Christ and others, not a mechanism for salvation.

In the verse we discover the meaning of daily forgiveness. We are to confess the sins that we are aware of in order to have forgiveness. Notice that he forgives, not only the sins that we are aware enough to confess, but also “all unrighteousness.” This is not talking about positional forgiveness, since it’s an ongoing command. When it’s obeyed it leads to better fellowship with Christ.

However, if a believer lets his daily sins pile up without confessing them in prayer, he is still saved, but his fellowship with Jesus is going to become impeded. The same is true of his fellowship with other believers. When we

hang onto unconfessed sins, we run the risk of damaging our friendship with the savior and the saved. He will still perform His promise of salvation even if we don't continually ask for daily forgiveness, but there will grow a distance between us and Him.

Hardly anyone would argue that seeking forgiveness is good, but how do we know it is supposed to be daily? For that let's take a look at Matthew 6:11-12:

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. [9](#)

You will probably recognize these verses from the popular Lord's prayer. This is the model that Jesus gave for private daily prayer. Notice the word, "daily" right there in the verse.

He then goes on to ask for forgiveness. Now, we need to understand that the Lord's prayer is a model that we are expected to expand upon. We are expected to fill this model in with specifics. So, each day as we pray we should ask forgiveness for the sins we have committed.

Now there is a very important caveat here. The daily forgiveness that we receive is in proportion to the daily forgiveness we give to others. Notice how he puts it:

...forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. [10](#)

In this we find that daily forgiveness works differently from positional forgiveness. Positional forgiveness is a once-for-all forgiveness we receive as a free gift, but daily forgiveness is something we receive as a result of our willingness to forgive others. When we add to that what we read in 1 John 1:9, we now have at least two conditions for gaining daily forgiveness. We must confess, and forgive others if we want to receive daily forgiveness.

We see this same concept repeated and added upon in Luke 11:4.

And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one." [11](#)

As we see in the second half of the verse, there is an expectation for improvement. We should not only be forgiving others, confessing our sins, and asking for forgiveness; but we also ought to ask for help in avoiding future failures. In my personal prayer time I have often said the words, “Be my tour guide and lead me around temptation.” The mental image that it conjures up is one in which a very familiar tour guide knows the local dangers and leads me, a witless tourist, to bypass those locations.

Not only does the phrase mention leading us away from temptation, but it speaks of a deliverance from the evil one. In this we see that some temptation is unavoidable. So, we also should ask that when we are faced with these unavoidable temptations, we don’t give in to the evil impulses, but we would be delivered.

If we want to be committed disciples we need to follow these four principles. Disciples confess sins daily, pray for forgiveness daily, forgive others constantly, and pray for victory over sin daily. If we can do those things our fellowship with Christ will enjoy a tremendous boost. That’s because we will be gaining daily forgiveness, which is the life blood of discipleship.

Positional forgiveness is a mechanism for salvation. Without positional forgiveness, salvation would not be possible. Daily forgiveness is a mechanism for discipleship. Without it, our fellowship with Christ will suffer tremendously.

TWENTY-ONE: T A K E A B A T H A N D W A S H Y O U R F E E T

**SEE THE VIDEO AT:
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For the first dozen summers that I can remember, I rarely wore shoes. Playing all day in the yard would cover the bottoms of my bare feet with a thick layer of dark grime. Even when I had started the day with a shower, there was hardly a summertime call for dinner when I didn't have to get the garden hose and wash my feet.

In this I have a familiar connection with the ancient world. Shoes generally consisted of opened-toed strapping, and travel was, by and large, on foot. It was common to need a little water to wash the day's accumulation from them when entering a house. Jesus and his disciples were accustomed to this need.

Jesus uses the analogy of feet washing to teach a very important lesson. In this chapter we will discover the difference between the spiritual meaning of taking a bath and washing our feet. Although, there are a few references to feet being washed in the New Testament, there is no narrative more famous than the one we find in John 13:5-10:

He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." ¹

A flabbergasted Peter is concerned and confused by what Jesus decides to do. He can't seem to grasp why the Lord, the great Messiah, would want to wash his feet. After protesting, Peter discovers that skipping this washing would have a big consequence. Jesus says, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

Based on the context and the Greek, the meaning here is not one which has salvation in view. Instead Jesus could be understood to be saying that Peter would be giving up his place among the disciples and forfeiting his portion. There was much to be gained by being a disciple and Peter quickly changed his tune. Basically what follows is Peter's request for a full sponge bath. He says, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"

In trying to compensate for his ignorance, Peter overshoots and reaches too far. This is an important point on which Jesus rests his teaching. We know from Jesus' words that the washing of the feet is connected to discipleship. What's fascinating is that Jesus makes a clear distinction between foot washing and bathing.

Jesus says, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." ² Here we find that Jesus' foot washing ceremony represents actions that must be taken if someone wants to take part in a life of discipleship. However, a bath is something that all the disciples, except Judas, had already done and never needed to do again.

In the previous chapter we discussed the meaning of positional forgiveness and daily forgiveness. We hear a clear and resounding echo of those concepts in Jesus' teaching. The bath represents salvation. We know Peter had already become a saved believer by this point. ³ Now Jesus

identifies eleven of the twelve as having become so as well. He then explains that the bath is a one-time event. It need not take place a second time.

I have heard many over-zealous preachers attempt to convince a congregation that they may, in fact, be unsaved. I've even heard fringe candidates claim that you could be saved at one time, but then lose that saved status. Jesus rejects this logic when he claims that a bath need happen only once. We discover, therefore that salvation is a one-time event. Not only does it not need to be done twice, it is impossible for salvation to happen a second time. Certainly there are many who have wasted years of their lives wondering and fretting that they may not be saved. We should take comfort in the fact that it happens once, and then it never needs to take place again.

However, there is something that we must do on a regular basis, wash our feet. As we mentioned before, the washing of the feet has to do with taking part in a life of discipleship and the reward attached. This lesson that Christ delivered was particularly important at this moment for the disciples.

That same night he would be arrested, and all but one would abandon him. Peter would deny that he knew him thrice. In light of this, it would be easy for the disciples to believe that they had been cast out of their positions of discipleship. In fact, they even might have doubted their own salvation during the three days that Jesus remained in the grave. However, Jesus wanted them to remember this lesson. First, all things are forgiven before God in a legal sense, and all things are forgivable that could block fellowship between the disciple and Christ.

He wanted to remind them that their salvation would not be jeopardized, no matter how they performed over the next 72 hours. That is a picture of positional forgiveness. [4](#) What's even more astounding is that even the sins and shortcomings they would commit would not stand between them and Christ if they were willing to seek daily forgiveness. [5](#) How powerful is the forgiveness of Christ, not only in a judicial sense but in a relational sense.

One final thing that we discover from these verses is that the bath and the washing of feet are two different things. They, therefore, must have two different methods for achieving them. The bath that Jesus discusses, their salvation, happened when each of these individuals put their faith in Jesus. When they believed in him for everlasting life, they received it right then and there. That is the moment when they took their spiritual bath. It's no

wonder that Jesus told disciples to get baptized, because hardly anything illustrates this spiritual bath better than taking a public bath.

However, the method for obtaining the washing of the feet is not the same as the method for obtaining the bath. Washing of the feet represents a relationship that is growing ever closer between a disciple and his master. So, those who seek daily forgiveness by confession in prayer get their feet washed by their master daily. John put it this way in his first letter:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [6](#)

How fantastic that when a saved person confesses their sin to their savior in prayer, He does what He did for Peter and the other disciples. He washes their feet. The one who is saved doesn't need to get saved again. Instead, the saved person needs a daily foot washing.

We discovered in this chapter that a bath represents the forgiveness we get at the moment of salvation, whereas feet washing represents the daily forgiveness a disciple gets when he confesses his sins to Christ. This simple distinction will allow us have confidence in our salvation and grow in our discipleship.

TWENTY-TWO: P OSITIONAL S ANCTIFICATION AND P RACTICAL S ANCTIFICATION

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The word *sanctification* is uncommon. I've rarely heard it used in casual conversation except when the words, *what is* precede it. In this chapter we are going to look at the difference between positional sanctification and practical sanctification. Before we understand the difference, we need to get a grip on this heavy and rare noun.

The Greek word that is translated "sanctify" can be also translated *set apart* . Persons who are sanctified are either set apart once and for all, or they are in a process of being set apart. To discover which type of sanctification, whether once or a process, the context must be considered. Let's take a look at 1 Corinthians 1:2. Paul says this in the opening of his letter:

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: [1](#)

The words “to be” do not appear in the Greek. ²Thus, Paul is calling his readers saints. It’s not a future hope that they are waiting on, but a present reality. This is valuable because being a saint is the fruition of being sanctified. “Saint” and “sanctified” come from the same root word, which in Latin is *sanctus*. If someone is a saint, it means that they have been sanctified at some point in the past.

Before you get the idea that the Corinthians were goodie-two-shoes, you have to understand that the church at Corinth was full of sin. In fact, it may be the most sin-filled church of all those mentioned in the Bible. A quick read through the letters that Paul sent to the church there gives a vivid image of how worldly these believers were. Why then, does Paul call them saints? How could they be sanctified if they are so sinful?

Easy. Jesus. All those who have believed in Jesus for eternal life are saints in a technical sense. Some call this forensic sanctification, which is to say, “It holds up in court.” These sinful saints have been set apart in terms of judgment and punishment. Believers can rest confidently in the fact that they will not have to stand before the final judgment that leads to Hell. ³In that sense they are saints. That’s why we call this use, positional sanctification. Like positional forgiveness, positional sanctification is not a process but a one time event in which the believer is cleansed. Thus, this type of sanctification stands as the believer’s holy identity for all time, regardless of his performance post-belief.

There is another type of sanctification, one not directly connected to salvation, but connected to discipleship. This is what we call practical sanctification. Let’s build a definition of practical sanctification by looking at John 17:17-19. In Jesus’ famous prayer the night he was arrested he requested this for his disciples:

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth... And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. ⁴

This is very telling. If both Jesus and the disciples who already had everlasting life could be sanctified, then this reference cannot be talking about the act of salvation. Here, Jesus points to the sanctifying power of truth that comes from God. The best way to understand this sense of practical sanctification could be described as being set apart.

Jesus set himself apart from the world, allowing Himself to be different so that he could accomplish His Father's work. In the same way He expects His disciples to be set apart from the world, so that they can accomplish His work as well. It is by the word of God, and its truth that we are able to experience this practical sanctification. Another very clear picture of this kind of practical sanctification comes in 2 Timothy 2:21:

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. [5](#)

The purpose of this practical sanctification is obvious from the above verse. Those who engage in practical sanctification are useful for accomplishing the Master's work. Paul tells us in another place that we are created for good works; [6](#) and here we find that in order to be prepared for every good work, we must cleanse ourselves from dishonorable things. By this we become approved workers in Christ.

We've discovered that positional sanctification is the saint-status that all believers have when they believe in Jesus for everlasting life. Practical sanctification is the continual process that a disciple pursues on his journey toward becoming more holy. Practical sanctification prepares us for every good work.

TWENTY-THREE:

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USTIFIED BY W ORKS .

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In college one justifies his status as a current student in different ways to different individuals. The professor needs to see an official roll sheet with the students name on it to consider them a current student. However, fellow classmates will believe one is a legitimate student of the university if they simply attend class. Those classmates don't have access to the roll sheet, so they can only know what they see the student doing. In the same way, a student who doesn't attend class is considered an official student by the professor who has them on his roll sheet. However, fellow students would not consider the absent one a student if they've never seen them in class. So, if one wants to justify their status as a student to their professor they just have to be on the sheet. However, if they want to justify their status to both their professor and classmates, they have to be on the roll sheet and attend class. This shows that there are different justification methods for different individuals. We will discover in this chapter that the same is true in our spiritual lives. Where being on the roll sheet is connected to faith, attending class is connected to works.

Justification is most often used to describe the legal status of a person before God. A justified person is a saved person under most uses that we find in the New Testament. By and large, seeing justification as a synonym for salvation works to interpret most Biblical texts most of time. However, there are a few exceptions to this rule, which is what we are going to uncover in this chapter, as we consider the difference between justified by faith, and justified by works.

Let's start with Paul's description of justification in Romans 3:20:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. [1](#)

No one is going to be saved from Hell by obeying the law. Anyone who possesses a body of flesh is stuck in this terrible dilemma; that no flesh will be justified in God's sight by following the rules. We can't attain salvation by works. Paul continues a few verses later.

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. [2](#)

I almost hear a collective sigh of relief at that verse. Paul built a palpable tension as he explains that no one can be saved by work. He lets the tension release with this simple idea. We are justified by faith not works. Salvation comes by that which is internal to man, not external. Faith alone in Christ alone brings eternal life. In case we missed it, in Romans 4:5 he clarifies with probably the most powerful statement of Grace ever uttered:

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, [3](#)

Not only is faith the agent that makes salvation possible, a person doesn't even need to work. Someone can believe on Him and just sit on the couch. Still he will be saved. Obviously there will be consequences, but according to Paul the consequences are not a loss of salvation.

Justification is so clearly defined by these three verses that if we closed our Bible here, we would have a singular vision of what justification is. It's connected to salvation, and happens as a one time event. When a person

believes in Jesus for everlasting life, they have been eternally justified, and will remain so regardless of how they perform in their Christian life. Flip a few pages over and it seems that James is singing a different tune.

James ostensibly disagrees with Paul's powerful claim, or at least has a different meaning for the word "Justified" in mind. Many have struggled without success to harmonize James' and Paul's perspectives. However, when we understand that there is more than one type of justification, the apparent differences come together. In the New Testament, the word "justified" is used almost universally in connection to salvation. Let's take a look at James 2:21-24.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

Here we find a break from the most common use of the word. Although, some have argued that James is claiming Abraham found a path to salvation through works, that is certainly not what James is saying. Even his own words a few verses later contradict that idea.

As we seek to understand how James could say that Abraham was declared righteous by his works, we should ask the question, who has declared him righteous? For one, God declared him righteous. However, God declared him righteous because of his faith not because of his works. ⁴ This was such a well known fact that James' readers would have heard those famous words ringing in their ears. Even Paul weighs in on it when he says:

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ⁵

So, Abraham's justification by works was not one that won him boasting rights before God. Yet we might ask again, "If God doesn't declare him righteous because of his works, who would?" Well, other people, for one. God didn't need to see Abraham's actions to know that his faith was genuine. ⁶ However, other people who were under Abraham's influence did not have the luxury of reading his heart and mind. If Abraham's faith was going to be proved genuine to the people around him, it would have to

make an appearance. Faith that doesn't act doesn't cease to be faith, but it is dead, as James has already said in this chapter.

Could Abraham's fellow man recognize a dead faith? Certainly not. However, they saw his living faith like an altar fire ablaze on a mountain side. So Abraham was not justified before God because of his actions, but those works proved to his fellow men and women that he had faith. He was justified by his works to mankind, and that includes us today. By this we see that his salvation came by faith alone, but his credibility among those he led and those who read his story came by his works. James goes on to explain:

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

What does it mean for faith to be made perfect? Being a perfect disciple does not mean that there are no failures along the way, but that the student follows the steps of discipleship toward perfection. In fact, the Greek word translated as *perfect* suggests development and maturation. ⁷ Even Jesus told the rich young ruler that he could be perfect if he followed his discipleship instructions. ⁸

Obviously faith being perfect can't mean that the disciple is completely without sin. Read through Abraham's life. He had a number of shortcomings and sins that he continued to trip over. Nonetheless, James uses this concept of a faith being perfected to illustrate Abraham's continual movement toward spiritual growth. James continues his idea as he says:

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. ⁹

Notice in this verse that there are two justifications going on. It's not one justification that comes by faith-plus-works. Instead, it's two separate and distinct justifications. The first is justification before God which comes by faith alone since he says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." The next sentence begins with the word *And*, letting us know that what comes next is a related but separate idea. The

second is justification before man, which comes by works, since it says he was called a friend of God.

We should ask, “Who called Abraham a friend of God?” Obviously God called him that, but what’s in focus here is that other people called him “a friend of God.” The fact that the statement is in third person tells us so. For if James were repeating God’s statement it would be rendered, “Abraham My friend.” ¹⁰ Instead the third person perspective tells us that it’s peers who recognized Abraham’s close relationship with God. And how did they know? Because of his works. Thus, Abraham carried the title “A friend of God” among the people that he led and influenced. That’s why scripture mentions it multiple times. ¹¹

In previous chapters we’ve talked about what it takes to be a friend of God. In this phrase we hear an echo of Jesus’ words:

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you... for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. ¹²

The disciple becomes a friend of God by obedience, as James himself explains only a few chapters later. ¹³ Therefore, we find that there are two types of justification. One has to do with faith alone in God’s promise. This justification is what Paul often used to describe the event of salvation. The other justification is one before our peers, in which our works validate our faith to them. When we follow Christ with fervor, it leaves those around us no other explanation but that our faith is real. Justification before men has to do with obeying God’s commands and doing the work of discipleship.

TWENTY-FOUR:

P O S I T I O N A L R I G H T E O U S N E S S

A N D P R A C T I C A L R I G H T E O U S N E S S

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We give gifts to people we like. I generally withhold gift giving from those with whom I have no fellowship or closeness. However, God decided to offer us a gift when we did not deserve it. In fact, there are those who will accept the gift and totally take advantage of His grace by not living a single day in pursuit of righteousness.

In the last chapter we looked at Romans 4:5 as part of our discovery of what it means to be justified by faith. In this chapter we will use the same verse to explore the difference between positional righteousness and practical righteousness:

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ¹

All people who come to Christ for salvation are justified at a moment when they are ungodly. In an instant God changes the core nature of the person. In judicial terms the new believer has positional righteous. This

status is such that they will never be more or less righteous before God than the moment that they believe. The saved person has entered an eternal state where Christ's righteousness is credited to us. ² It's as if we have been given access to his righteousness credit card, and there is no limit.

Some moan that this concept encourages some to abuse God's grace. However, it was Paul who said it. In case we become tempted to use this as a license to sin, he discourages such thought when he says, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" ³ He further warns of the heavy consequence when a believer does not work, they will suffer loss at the judgment seat of Christ. ⁴

Despite his provisos and warnings, it doesn't change the fact that Paul openly admits in Romans 4:5 that someone can have salvation completely without works before or after the moment he receives eternal life. The image of a person getting such a costly gift for free, and then doing nothing to show gratitude raises our ire. Though, we must be cautious that we do not mistake our sinful jealousy for limits on grace that do not exist. Will some abuse this free gift? Of course, but grace-abusers can't change the nature of the gospel. Righteousness is given as an inalienable position in Christ for the one who believes in Him. Positional righteousness is a finalized status of the believer.

It shouldn't surprise you that the meaning of the word righteousness has some elasticity in the way that it can be translated. Although it often is used to describe positional righteousness for those who are saved, there are plenty of times when it's referred to in reference to discipleship. In this context we call it practical righteousness.

Practical righteousness can be seen in 1 Timothy 6:11, when Paul says:

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. ⁵

In the preceding section, Paul is teaching his young disciple, Timothy, that he should resist the pull of wealth and riches. He continues with these wise instructions. The list in which righteousness falls here gives us the best indication as to what type Paul is referring.

Paul says "pursue righteousness." He can't be talking about the kind of righteousness someone receives when they become a believer because it is not something to be pursued. To pursue positional righteousness would be

the same as working for salvation, which negates one's ability to have it. Where positional righteousness is received without effort or work by the one who believes in Jesus for everlasting life, this type of righteousness has to be sought with practical steps. Therefore, he's talking about a righteousness that focuses on daily living as a disciple.

We've already discussed how it is technically possible for a believer to do no work, but once again Paul is warning against that sinful mindset and lifestyle. He instructs his student to chase after such fine things as these, among which is practical righteousness. The verse and its context give virtually no further instruction on how to do what he's been told, but that is because Paul views Timothy as a mature believer. This acts as a reminder to stay strong and is no new lesson for the well-seasoned Timothy. The verdict is that godly living is in view when the disciple is encouraged to pursue righteousness.

These two verses serve to show us the clear distinction between positional righteousness, which is what all believers have in Christ, and practical righteousness, which is what all disciples should seek on a daily basis.

TWENTY-FIVE:
S P I R I T B A P T I S M A N D W A T E R B
A P T I S M

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A number of years ago I was invited to preach a series of evangelistic events in Latvia. It's a beautiful little country which found its freedom after the fall of the Soviet Union. By the time I went, it had warmed to the gospel message, and many young people were ready to believe. The trip lasted about two weeks. We focused our efforts on a small rural town called Cesis. Through public talks and Bible-studies with locals, twenty-one Latvians believed in Jesus. In excitement, they wanted to get baptized right away. We could hardly be more thrilled to see the fruit.

Our mission team approached the local church with whom we had partnered. The healthiest way to get these new believers to grow would be to have them get connected with the church. However, to our chagrin the church leadership refused to baptize them. They demanded that the new believers attend church for a year before they be baptized. They thought it would be inappropriate to baptize young people who hadn't yet proved they were saved. Apparently the way that they were supposed to prove they were

saved was with good works and a year's worth of church attendance. We were shocked, and I did my best to explain the mistake in their understanding. Ultimately we baptized the new believers ourselves when we saw that the church would not change their mind. The leadership of that church not only misunderstood the distinction between salvation and discipleship, but even the role that baptism is supposed to play.

Baptism is an ancient tradition that dates back to before Christian times. The root word means dip. This simple meaning makes it seem as if the word could never be misunderstood and misapplied. Despite its apparent simplicity, there is great confusion about what the role and purpose of baptism is in the life of a believer.

There are at least two main theological uses of the word baptize that are significant to us. In this chapter we will explore the difference between Spirit baptism and water baptism. Let's find out about Spirit baptism from 1 Corinthians 12:13.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. [1](#)

There is a word capitalized in the first line of the verse. Do you see it? Spirit starts with a capital S because it's talking about a specific spirit. It's the Holy Spirit that does the work of Spirit Baptism. As one of the three persons of the trinity, the Holy Spirit has the authority and ability to bring the believer to life at the moment of their salvation.

This verse shows us that no matter the ethnic background or social status, the believer has been immersed in and made to drink the same Spirit. The effect of this Spirit baptism is that the believer has become part of one body.

What body? Obviously the church is in view here, when he later says,

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. [2](#)

It's as if we are organs who get implanted in the body of Christ when we experience Spirit baptism. We become part of the church. This means that we should play a part, and work together with the other members of the

church. However, the fact that some members don't work well together is exactly why he had need to give this teaching.

Paul deftly weaves this image of a body which is knit together by the spirit, one organ at a time. Spirit baptism, which happens at salvation by the power of God, makes that possible. So, Spirit baptism is not something that must be earned or worked for; its part of the present that we receive when we get everlasting life. Likewise, someone can't get unbaptized anymore than someone can get unsaved. It's an irrevocable event. Paul explained from another angle in Galatians 3:26-27:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [3](#)

The condition for being a son, in this sense, is faith in Christ. This echoes what John 1:12 tells us. After establishing that he goes on to explain, "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." This means that there is no condition outside of faith to have this type of baptism. When one believes in Jesus for everlasting life he experiences the Spirit baptism, and by this act he also has put on Christ. It carries with it the image of being clothed with Christ, or even covered by him. Thus, the eternal punishment of God will pass over and not affect the one who is covered with Christ in this manner.

Spirit baptism is connected to salvation and happens automatically at the moment of faith in Christ. However, there is another event which carries a similar name that every Christian should undergo, but is not automatic. Water baptism is one of the main things that Jesus instructed his followers to do. Passages that teach a person how to have everlasting life do not present water baptism as a requirement for salvation. [4](#) Though, anyone who wishes to be a committed disciple is expected to take this first public step.

Let's take a look at Matthew 28:19-20 to see the difference:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." [5](#)

The first thing that we notice about this verse is that it's a description of how to make disciples. We can't disconnect the instructions found within from discipleship. There are certainly those who have placed their faith in Christ who have not fulfilled the command of Jesus to undergo water baptism. In fact, the church where I grew up had a piano player who was deathly afraid of water who never underwent water baptism. While someone can be saved apart from water baptism, it would be hard to call a person who refuses baptism an obedient disciple by Jesus' definition.

Before Christianity, baptism was an act of conversion used for Gentiles converting to Judaism. It was used to initiate a person into a new faith. ⁶ However, when Jesus instructs his followers to baptize others as disciples, he's shifting the focus of what baptism would have meant to his hearers at the time. Although new converts who wished to be initiated into the Jewish faith would be baptized, they would not be baptized into discipleship. That's because before Jesus only Rabbis made disciples. Discipleship was limited to a handful of students. The Rabbi would make disciples by fashioning his pupils to be like himself.

Jesus shifts the focus here and instead teaches that they were to make disciples, fashioned not in their own image, but instead in their master's. That all believers, even gentiles were supposed to become disciples was unique to Jesus. Secondly the idea that baptism would be initiation into discipleship was a fresh notion. All of this represents a shift from the pre-Christian meaning of discipleship and baptism.

Jesus further explains the expectations after water baptism when he says, "...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Therefore, the expectation for disciples is observance. The word *observe* in English can mean either to *notice* , or to *obey* . He means to obey in this context. Thus it could be said that water baptism is only the first step on a lifelong journey of discipleship.

Baptism, as it stands today is a public expression of what has already happened privately. Water baptism is a visual representation of the invisible Spirit baptism. All those who are saved have experienced Spirit baptism, but if one seeks to be a disciple, he will also obey Christ and publicly be baptized in water. Water baptism, like all the acts and works of a disciple, has no power to save from Hell. Being baptized in water is all about obeying Christ, and going public before mankind.

In this chapter we've seen that Spirit baptism automatically takes place at the moment salvation occurs. Water baptism is a voluntary act that publicly represents the new birth experienced by the believer.

TWENTY-SIX:

S AVED FROM C ONDEMNATION

AND S AVED F ROM W RATH

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In our modern, church-lingo saturated culture, we've taken certain words and conscripted them for specific uses, when in scripture those same words have fluidity. It's important that we don't try to wrestle biblical words into a straightjacket in an attempt to make them mean only one thing. The words "saved" and "salvation" are no exception. In fact, only 30% of the uses of the words "saved" and "salvation," in the New Testament refer to salvation from Hell. ¹ That means that seven out of ten times you see the word "saved" or "salvation" it isn't talking about the most popular meaning of the word. That's why you need to ask a simple question whenever you see the word "saved" or "salvation."

Saved from what? This question is an indispensable tool in interpreting the Bible correctly. In this chapter we will be discovering the difference between being "saved from condemnation," and "saved from wrath." Although these two ideas sound like twins with different names, they are more like second cousins once removed.

Let's first look at what it means to be saved from condemnation in John 3:17-18:

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [2](#)

In verse 17 appears the word "saved." That should trigger us to automatically ask, "Saved from what?" The answer is revealed in the next verse when he explains that those who don't believe in the Son of God are condemned already.

Condemnation, then, is already the destiny of those who don't believe. Since, by default, mankind doesn't believe in Christ, and must be persuaded to do so, all men are condemned unless otherwise convinced to believe in the Son.

The condemnation here has an obvious connection with the previous verse, John 3:16. Being condemned and not being condemned are synonyms for "perish" and "eternal life." Therefore, being saved from condemnation in this verse is the equivalent of being saved from Hell.

As we move to the next phrase, we will have to stow many of our preconceived ideas about what some standard biblical terms mean. Let's take a look at our next verses, Romans 1:16-18, as we cross over from salvation to discipleship:

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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, [3](#)

On first reading the above verses you may not see why they are considered discipleship verses since they seem to employ salvation terminology. However, our new Bible study tool can help us out on this one. Paul says, 'saved' so our question should be "saved from what?" The simple answer is saved from "God's wrath" as it says in verse 18. That opens us to

another question. What is God's wrath? To understand that, we need a wider view of what Paul's letter to the Romans is about. Let's explore.

Paul discusses justification, which is a synonym for the status of immortal believers, between chapters 3:21-4:25. In this section he hammers the idea that being justified is equivalent to eternal salvation from Hell. Probably the best description of justification comes from Romans 3:23-24.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ⁴

Clearly, believers are justified by grace, and it's free. In another letter he said, "By grace you have been saved." ⁵ No one who reads Paul's justification section disputes that it's the word "justification" that he uses to talk about being saved from Hell.

What might strike you as strange is that his justification section, 3:21-4:25, doesn't use the word "saved" or "salvation" a single time. This is odd to someone who has chained the word "saved" to the meaning salvation from Hell. However, when we free the word "saved" to its range of meanings, the truth comes out.

Paul decides not to use "saved" or "salvation" to describe justification in his section that defines it. That means we have to be very careful when we see the word "saved" or "salvation" in the other parts of his letter. Might they mean a salvation from something other than Hell?

There are basically two main categories for what a person can be saved from. People can be saved from damnation or saved from damage. Being saved from damnation would mean that the person is saved from Hell. However, "saved from damage" can mean a range of things. Jesus saved people from their illnesses when he healed them. In fact, the word we translate as saved is often translated as "healed" or "made well." That is a salvation from a damaged life. Jesus also saved the disciples from drowning when he calmed the storm, and the demon-possessed man was saved from spiritual torment. So, a person can be saved from eternal damnation or saved from temporary damage.

If you read through his letter as a whole, from the beginning, Paul defines salvation as deliverance from God's present displeasure brought about by sins. ⁶ His thesis is that the world is and has been experiencing the wrath of God. God demonstrates his wrath by releasing the world to suffer sin's full

consequences. You can see that in Romans 1:18, and in the following verses. That means that “God's wrath” in Romans is not to be understood as Hell.

To further support this, in all the explanations of God's wrath in Romans, [7](#)it's described in present tense, not as a future judgment. Even in his other letters Paul uses the term "God's wrath" as a present reality, and not as a future condemnation to Hell. [8](#)In Romans, wrath is a manifestation of God's temporal displeasure. [9](#)This fits with the Old Testament sense of "God's wrath" since to the prophets, the wrath of God was continually operating. [10](#)

In the opening chapter, Paul sets out both a dilemma and a hope to overcome. The problem with the world is that God is pouring out wrath, but the gospel, “is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” When we ask, “Salvation from what?” the answer rings back loud and clear. He's talking about salvation from the damage of sin (God's wrath) and not salvation from Hell. He shows that believers are able to be saved from “God's wrath” and the damage it causes.

He then goes on to give a vivid description of what God's wrath is in vs. 24, 26, and 28. In those verses we find out what “God's wrath” looks like.

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.... For this reason God gave them up to vile passions... God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; [11](#)

God allows the mounting consequence of sin to be felt by the human race without alleviating the present suffering it causes. Since Paul is focused on God's angry outpouring of wrath on the sinful world here-and-now, some astute Bible translators have rendered well-known verses like Romans 5:9-10 this way:

If therefore we have now been pronounced free from guilt through His blood, much more shall we be delivered from God's anger through Him [12](#), if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, all the more, since we have been reconciled, we shall be delivered by His life. [13](#)

Now that we have established that justification does not mean saved from Hell, we notice an interesting thing in the verses. Paul uses a standard since-then format here. It could be rendered, “[since] we’ve been justified, [then] we shall be saved from wrath.

One can follow the other, but they are not synonyms. This brings up a valuable question. Is this deliverance from God’s temporal wrath an automatic conclusion for all people who believe in him for eternal life? In other words, is there something a Christian has to do to be delivered from this present wrath? The answer is “yes.” The Greek tells us that the deliverance from “God’s wrath” is expected under certain circumstances [14](#). What’s more, Paul then tells us what the conditions are that have to be met.

Verse 10 explains that first we must be justified by his death. After that condition is met, His life is what will allow us to experience deliverance from God’s temporal wrath. Obviously then, one must be a believer before they can expect to be delivered from the damage that God’s wrath causes, but then, what does it mean to be “delivered by His life”?

The answer is, by following the example of Jesus’ life we can be delivered from God’s temporal wrath. Following Jesus’ example is clearly a term of discipleship. It’s obedience to Christ’s example and commandments that leads to victory. However, He doesn’t leave us alone in the struggle. He later says, “Just as Christ was raised from the dead... we also should walk in newness of life.” [15](#) So it’s actually the same power that brought Jesus back from the dead that gives us the ability to obey Christ. We have resurrection power that he has provided for us, as we make our attempt to follow and obey. When we obey Christ on a daily basis, we will gain victory over a damaged life. We will begin to escape the “wrath of God” through discipleship.

Our justification by grace through faith frees us from eternal condemnation, but our discipleship by hard work frees us from God’s wrath which the world is currently experiencing. Obedient discipleship is the key to freedom. Paul sums this up nicely when he says this in Romans 8:5,9:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit... So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. [16](#)

Therefore, a believer who refuses or neglects discipleship will inevitably live in the flesh. Paul teaches that if we choose a life of discipleship instead of pursuing the flesh, we will be delivered from God's anger and instead please him.

In this chapter we discovered that Paul has two distinct messages that run through the book of Romans. His first message is that justification is by faith in Christ. His second message is that deliverance comes by the good works of a believer. These two concepts, once again, reinforce the Bible's most consistent distinction between salvation and discipleship. Being saved from condemnation is connected to salvation, while being saved from God's wrath is connected to discipleship. When we keep this vital difference in mind the Bible is much more clear.

TWENTY-SEVEN:

S A V E D F R O M T H E W R A T H T O C

O M E A N D S A V E D F R O M W R A T H

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In this chapter we will explore the difference between being “saved from the wrath to come” and being “saved from wrath.” The last chapter discussed the latter at length so this chapter will largely focus on the former.

Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians will form the entirety of our exploration into "the wrath to come." As you will see, avoiding "the wrath to come" is a matter of salvation. In his letter, Paul seeks to encourage believers who are being persecuted by telling them about things that will happen in the future. One of these future events is “the wrath to come.” See how he describes it in 1 Thessalonians 1:10:

...wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. [1](#)

In the previous chapter we looked at a type of wrath that is currently taking place. However, this wrath is different in its time frame. Paul makes

it clear that the wrath he is referring to will take place on a future date. If he is not speaking of temporal retribution for the world's current sin, then this must mean something that will happen at a future date.

To understand what "the wrath to come" refers to it is helpful to remember the situation that the Thessalonians were experiencing. They were suffering persecution for proclaiming their faith throughout Macedonia. ²Paul is explaining that there is a coming time when the world will experience an even greater trouble by far than they were currently experiencing. The future days of trouble will be those in which believers are rescued by Jesus. Paul is going to explain more about this coming wrath, but first let's look at what he has to say about the rescue plan a few chapters later in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. ³

This event is popularly called "the rapture," which is taken from the Latin for, "caught up." After the Lord descends, three sounds and three actions follow. Let's break the passage down into its parts.

It says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven." The Lord, Jesus, will exit Heaven and come toward the Earth. However, it doesn't indicate that he will descend all the way to the Earth, but instead that he comes only to a near-earth location in the sky. As he descends the first sound is heard. The three sounds are mentioned together, but we will connect the actions that might correspond with each sound.

The first sound is a "shout" possibly by the Lord's voice. At this shout the first action takes place, which is "the dead in Christ will rise." All those who have believed in Jesus and died physically will come to life at the sound of his voice. Jesus tells us about this event when he says in another place, "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live." ⁴

The second sound is the voice of an archangel. possibly a commanding angel with instructions to his subordinates. This sound seems most likely to correspond with the event of the believers being caught up. At that point all

believers, both newly-resurrected and those who are still alive, will be relocated to the place where Christ is. The reference to the angel's voice may have something to do with Jesus' words in Matthew when he said, "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. [5](#)."

The third sound is the trumpet of God. It's possible this sound corresponds with the awaited meeting of the King and His beloved church. In the same way that trumpets would resound at a royal wedding, the trumpet of God is sounded when Christ and his church finally meet in the air.

He finishes the section by assuring the Thessalonians that we will never be parted from Christ again. It is sure to be a joyous occasion. It does, however, leave a few questions. For instance, why doesn't Jesus descend all the way to the Earth? Why must we meet him in the air?

The answer to that has to do with his plan for the Earth during that meeting. After believers are removed from the Earth, and during the time that they are off the planet, God is going to bring a tremendous tribulation upon to the world and its remaining inhabitants. This period is often called the tribulation and is described in great detail in the book of Revelation. However, Paul gives us a succinct description a chapter later in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. [6](#)

Paul gives some incredible clues as to what that period will be like, and how to recognize its dawning. First he tells them that they will not be able to put it on their calendar because it will come like a thief in the night. It will come when no-one is expecting it.

However, there is a sign that it is near. When the world is caught up in talking about peace and safety, the time is near. The world will be lulled into a false sense of security before sudden destruction comes.

He makes sure to tell us that they will not escape. That is, no one left on the Earth will escape the trouble that will strike. No one will escape what we now can call, "the wrath to come." This wrath that will strike the world is exactly what Paul was talking about when he first spoke of "the wrath to come" in chapter 1.

He then comforts his readers by saying, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief." Although all believers will be included in the rapture, it's likely that many believers will be surprised because they were not faithful and eager for the Lord's return. However, he assures the Thessalonians that they wouldn't be surprised because they are living in light of eternity. It's a good reminder for us.

In case some believers might fear that they will be subjected to the "wrath to come," Paul gives one more comfort to the contrary in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10.

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. [2](#)

That we are not appointed to wrath, could be taken in a number of ways, but Paul has in mind what he had already mentioned in chapter 1, "the wrath to come." In assuring the Thessalonians that they will miss out on "the wrath to come" (the tribulation), Paul sets up a clear opposite here. He points out that suffering "the wrath to come" is not in store for those who have salvation. In other words, those who have everlasting life will not experience the tribulation. This comes only after he's explained the mechanism that Christ will use to rescue believers from "the wrath to come."

He then finishes by saying, "...whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." Here he seems to be admitting that he honestly doesn't know if he or they will still be physically alive by the time of the rapture. This was written around 50 A.D. And Paul was aware that some eyewitnesses of Jesus's resurrected appearances had passed away [8](#). The reassurance is in the fact that whether the believer lives until Christ comes or dies before then, they will avoid "the wrath to come" and be with Christ forever.

Therefore, "the wrath to come" and avoiding it is done by obtaining salvation. All those who have placed their faith in Christ will skip out on the tribulation.

Since "the wrath to come" and avoiding it is connected to salvation, you can guess where we are going next. Now let's compare "the wrath to come" from 1 Thessalonians with "God's wrath" found in Romans. This subject was covered at length in the previous chapter. For a fuller explanation see chapter twenty-six.

Since it's already been covered this will be a very condensed version. Let's review Romans 1:18 to see what "God's wrath" is:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men [9](#)

"God's wrath" is an expression of his temporal displeasure with the mankind that is currently being inflicted on the world. This infliction is represented by the consequence and suffering that sin causes on all of humanity. Paul teaches us the conditions for escaping "God's wrath" in Romans 1:16 and other places:

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. [10](#)

Those who seek to escape "God's wrath" must first be believers, and second must be willing to live out their faith (not ashamed) in order to be delivered from God's temporal wrath. Romans 5:9-10 shows that in more specific detail.

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. [11](#)

Escaping this kind of wrath is an option only for believers. It doesn't happen automatically for all Christians, however. Instead, a life of discipleship is required. For more information on this see the previous

chapter. The basic truth is that “the wrath to come” and “God’s wrath” are speaking of two separate events.

In this section we discovered that escaping "the wrath to come" is done by obtaining salvation, while discipleship is required to be delivered from God’s temporal wrath. Understanding how these two are distinct and how they correspond to salvation and discipleship is important to keep us on track in our attempt to interpret the Bible accurately.

TWENTY-EIGHT:

S A V E D W I T H O U T W O R K S A N D S

A V E D W I T H W O R K S

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Growing up I often was taught that salvation did not come by works. However, we are going to find, in this chapter that that is not entirely true. That may come as a surprise, but by the end of the chapter you will see how this idea fits into the concept of salvation and discipleship. Some will be saved without works, but others will be saved with works. We are going to investigate the difference between being "saved without works," and being "saved with works." Our first stop on this journey is Acts 16:30-31:

And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." [1](#)

This verse demonstrates the single requirement to have everlasting life, which is to believe in Christ. Paul and Silas give this simple instruction: that if the man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ he will be saved. Paul adds this important appendix to it, "you and your household." That is a valuable

line because it tells us that the condition is the same for everyone. Paul and Silas want to make it clear that the jailer wasn't getting a special deal because he let an apostle out of jail. Instead, anyone who follows these instructions will be saved.

Now this doesn't imply that the one who believes won't or can't do good works. It simply means that even if there are no works now or in the future, the believer is still saved. Receiving salvation has nothing to do with works, and everything to do with faith. Therefore, it's possible to be "saved without works."

Despite that being a possibility, the hope is that every believer takes up the mission of discipleship, and works for his Lord. The fact that works are voluntary means that we should encourage believers to work all the more.

That's why we need to see the distinction between being "saved without works" and being "saved with works." Let's find out what being "saved with works" means from James 1:21.

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²

The Greek phrase found here "save your soul" is not a reference to eternal salvation from Hell. "Save your soul" was in common use in the sense of "to save the life." It is used in both the Greek Old Testament and the New Testament to mean saving a person's 'life' ³ or saving 'oneself.' ⁴

In fact, we can see an obvious connection when we read the section that precedes these words. James speaks about enduring and overcoming trials and temptation. The concept that a person could be saved from such trouble in the present life fits perfectly with the flow of ideas.

Note the actions the verse prescribes for this physical deliverance. The believer needs to lay aside filth and wickedness and take up a meek attitude as they receive the word of God. These are all action-oriented. These are not automatic outcomes of becoming a believer, but instead are good works that a believer needs to be encouraged to do.

Therefore, a person is physically saved by works. A person's commitment to discipleship will result in a physical deliverance from troubles that plague the uncommitted believer. James never promises that the trials will not come; in fact, he encourages us by saying, "Count it all

joy when you fall into various trials,” [5](#) and in a following verse, “Blessed is the man who endures trials.” [6](#)

So, being saved by works doesn’t mean that we will get to skip life-trials, but instead that we be able to endure them with honor. The claim that good works can save the life of the believer who does them appears, not only here at the beginning of the book, but in the last line of the letter as well. Here’s how he puts it there.

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. [7](#)

When we take these verses together with 1:21, it is clear that James is speaking of the same idea. However, here he specifically says, “save a soul from death.” We don’t even need to ask, “saved from what,” because he explains clearly. It’s important that you soak this up. James begins his book with the concept that a believer who falls into trials and temptations can suffer the deadly consequences of sin, but that their physical life can be saved by turning away from sin and doing good works. He also ends the book with the reminder that a believer who falls into trials and temptation is in danger of the deadly consequences of sin, but their physical life can be saved by turning and doing good works. His letter begins and ends with this idea. Would it be safe to say that this is the point of his writing?

James repeats the same idea once more in the middle of his letter in 2:14-17:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? [8](#)

At seeing the word “save” we ought to ask, “saved from what.” Although, it should hardly be a surprise that saved should mean the same thing here that it does in the opening and closing of his letter. James is connecting us back to the sense of the word which he used to book-end his writing.

Thus, the rhetorical question and its implied answer sound as if James is claiming that faith alone cannot save a person. In fact, that is what he is claiming. He’s claiming that salvation can’t come by faith alone. The

caveat, and it's a big one, is that he's not talking about eternal salvation from Hell. He's talking about salvation from the deadly consequences of sin.

James has already stated it, and will state it once more before he's through. He wants them to know that in order for this physical salvation to take place, believers need to have works. This doesn't contradict that eternal salvation comes by faith alone. Physical salvation, in the sense he means it, comes by works. Therefore, being saved with works is all about discipleship.

Let's look at one more verse in Philippians 2:12:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; [9](#)

This verse has often been used to teach that eternal salvation from Hell requires good works. However, the answer to, "salvation from what?" sends us searching through the book of Philippians.

Paul uses the word "saved" and "salvation" three times in Philippians. As Paul is writing this letter he is in chains. [10](#) He's awaiting his trial in Rome. He seems confident that he will be released (saved) from imprisonment. That is how he means the first usage of the word saved in 1:19.

The second use of the word "salvation" comes a few verses later. Paul tells the Philippians not to be intimidated by their enemies. [11](#) Who are their enemies? There was a rash of false teachers that Phillippi was dealing with. [12](#) This courage in the face of adversity will encourage them in their deliverance from trouble by God. [13](#)

The fact that there is already use of the words "saved" and "salvation" not referring to "salvation from Hell" only a few verses previous is significant. It makes sense that Paul is not talking about salvation from Hell when he says "work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

The answer comes clear by understanding that Paul is drawing a connection between his own hoped-for salvation from jail, and the Philippians hoped-for salvation from the trouble with false teachers. Paul was confident that he would be able to work out his own salvation (from jail) when he stood trial. Standing trial in Rome could definitely be a time of fear and trembling.

In a similar way, Paul called the Philippians' enemies, "dogs" and "mutilators of the flesh." You can image that dogs and flesh mutilators might cause a little fear and trembling as well. Paul was calling them to work on being saved from those enemies. It seems he's saying, "Don't lay down and take it, but fight back." Having to fight a dog and flesh mutilator would cause fear and trembling, but Paul wants them to be saved from this trouble.

How were they to fight back and work on being saved from their enemies? By obedience. He says it this way, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence." They would be able to obtain victory over their adversaries by obeying Paul, and consequently Christ.

This could be called "salvation by works" since he tells them to fight for this physical salvation by doing work. It's not salvation from Hell, but from enemies.

What a vital distinction this is. Many people have tripped over these verses because they have assumed that "saved" and "salvation" always mean the same thing, salvation from hell. When we understand the fluid meaning of "saved," we can see how a salvation by works is possible.

We've learned in this chapter that being saved without works is connected to having everlasting life by faith alone. However, being saved with works is about discipleship. For those who choose the hard work of a disciple, they can expect to be delivered from a range of physical issues that the damage of sin can cause.

TWENTY-NINE:

S A V E D F R O M H E L L A N D S A V I N G

T H E L I F E

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In this chapter we will look at the difference between being saved from Hell and saving one's life. To understand the process of being saved from Hell, let's first look at Ephesians 2:8-9:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹

The first thing we must ask when we see the word *saved* is "saved from what?" As J.B. Bond puts it, "This salvation is in the perfect tense, showing action that happened in the past with continuing results. When the Ephesians exercised faith they were saved and the results continue on. ²"

When salvation is talked about in terms of a current possession, the Bible is denoting eternal salvation from Hell. We see the ultimate destiny of those who are not described by the above verse when in Revelation 20:15 John says:

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. [3](#)

Those who are not saved by grace through faith, can expect to be thrown into the lake of fire at the end of the age. This gut-wrenching outcome should make all who have rejected Christ reconsider their position on the matter. God is both deadly serious about his call for all to believe in His son, and He's willing to prosecute any who don't with eternal ramifications.

That's why it is such a comfort that Paul says we are saved by grace, which is unmerited favor. He then adds that this transaction happens through faith. While we are saved by the unmerited favor of God, faith is the conduit through which that favor is allowed to flow. Any who believe, which is the same Greek word *pistis* used here, in Jesus for everlasting life will be freed from this horrifying destination.

Now that we have established the condition for being saved from hell, let's take a look at a passage that explains how to save one's life:

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it. What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life? [4](#)

The astute Bible student will recognize this passage with a few slight changes. The more traditional translations render the second two instances of the word *life* (*psychē*) as *soul*. That is an unfortunate translation considering that the word is the same for the four times it is used in these verses. The traditional translation reveals a theological bias among translators. Fortunately more modern translations have picked up on this error and corrected accordingly.

With this superior translation we find out a few important facts about what Jesus is teaching. First of all Matthew writes, "Then Jesus said to His disciples." The fact that Jesus is speaking specifically to his disciples and not to the crowds at large is important. This is a teaching that is intended for those who have already believed and chosen to follow him on a daily basis.

Secondly, in that same verse we get a valuable aspect of discipleship. Jesus says, “If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.” It’s easy to view this as poetic language couched in religious jargon, but for the original hearers, it wasn’t. It was a call to prepare for death. The cross was a cruel implement of capital punishment. This statement might be like telling a group of students, “Sit in your electric chair,” or “Take your lethal injection.” For the disciples, there was no mistaking what he meant. He was telling them that this road they were on would likely end in death. For at least ten of them it did.

With these words he has made it clear that he is talking about physical death. The disciple is expected to be so committed that he is willing and able to give up his life for the sake of Christ. Certainly not all disciples are going to die a martyr’s death, but all that intend to come after Christ should prepare and expect for their own martyrdom as a possibility.

Although this is a heavy price to pay, Jesus assures His listeners that it will be worth it when He says, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it.” He’s pointing out that whatever is lost for the sake of Christ, even if it is a person’s entire life, the dividend that is received in return will be of equivalent, and even greater value. He doesn’t specify in this verse what that reward will be other than to say that the one willing to be martyred will find his life. This is to say, a wonderful experience when they enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

We know that he is talking about reward, and not eternal salvation, because in the next line he says, “What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life?” Many translations render that question, “what will it profit...” This teaching is focused on the profit; the payback; the reward a disciple stands to gain by being *all in*. By implication he teaches that the disciple who is willing to go to the gas chamber for Christ will profit big, even though he loses his life.

He also shows that one’s physical life is not worth saving in comparison to what will be gained for committed discipleship. He says, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it.” What we stand to gain as committed disciples is so great that it is reasonable to let our lives go in exchange for the full experience in the life to come. That is, after all, what is in view here. A person’s eternal destiny is determined by their faith in Christ. However, their eternal experience will be determined by their commitment to Christ in discipleship.

That's why, in the most real sense, the way to salvage your life is to live as a disciple. Short of being a martyr many things are expected of disciples that look as if one's life is being sacrificed on a daily basis. I have a friend who had a sweet job, made a fat and growing bank account, and drove fancy cars. After he had been a believer for a few years, he felt the call of Jesus to live a life of discipleship. He gave all of his worldly possessions up and went into ministry. He now lives below the poverty line, and sometimes has trouble paying his bills. To the outsider, he wrecked his life. He abandoned the life that so many are chasing. He gave it up in order to find it. Although, he has not been martyred, at least not yet, he has undergone a form of giving up his life. Even in the here and now, his life is better than ever.

The disciples, too, had experienced this. Even by this point, they had given up houses, missed their families, and abandoned jobs to follow Christ. Sometimes our discipleship requires this of us. When our way of life hangs in the balance, it's a huge motivation to remember that giving up your life will profit big in the end. As Jesus puts it, that is the only way to really find your life. It might be said that someone who is not willing to give up anything is not ready for a life of discipleship.

To propose, as some have done, that all believers must be willing to die or give up their lifestyle in order to be saved from Hell is ludicrous. Much of that confusion has come from an inferior translation and a theological bias. These verses are clearly about discipleship and the cost associated with it.

In this chapter we have seen that discipleship has a component implicit within that the committed follower should be willing to give up his life, whether in part or in whole. Salvation from Hell comes by faith alone, but saving one's life comes by losing it. Salvation is by faith, but discipleship comes by loss of one's way of life, or life itself.

THIRTY:

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What is the difference between believing in Christ and confessing Christ? If you listened to the average stadium evangelist, you'd get the idea that the confession accompanies a walk down the aisle and the sinner's prayer. I've sat through enough sermons with confusing invitations at the end to know that there needs to be clarity on this issue.

In this chapter we will examine the difference between the terms "believe in Christ" and "confess Christ." Let's start by looking at John 11:25-26:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ¹

In these famous words of Jesus, we find the answer to the eternal salvation question. Those who believe in Jesus as the resurrection and the life will be resurrected and never die. This concept is reiterated over and

over throughout the gospel where this verse appears. Anyone who believes in Jesus has everlasting life.

In these two verses we discover that which comprises a saving belief in Christ. Someone must believe that Jesus is the one who will bring about resurrection, and give eternal life. Then if someone believes in Jesus for that life, they have it as soon as they believe. What's significant about this verse is what it leaves out. It does not mention that a public, verbal confession is required. This verse is not an anomaly. None of the verses that give this single condition for eternal salvation include such statements. Why then have so many evangelists added this to the gospel?

To answer that we will transition from discussing the requirement for salvation to a discussion about discipleship. Every action a believer is expected to accomplish, after the moment he believes in Jesus falls into the category of discipleship. This includes confession. So, what is confession? We don't have to guess since Paul tells us very clearly in Philippians 2:11:

...every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord... [2](#)

In this we find a simple and concise definition. Confession is an action that is performed with the tongue. The mouth speaks words that proclaim Jesus to be the Christ and Lord. Confession is a verbal action in which the person speaks the truth about Jesus' position and status. It's particularly focused on expressing submission to Christ. Therefore, confession is a good work. That's why it falls in the domain of the disciple, but is not a requirement for gaining eternal life.

Let's take a look at some believers who found it too difficult to confess in John 12:42-43:

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; [3](#)

Here we discover that these born-again believers were unable to confess Christ. We know they had salvation because Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. [4](#)" These silent believers had eternal life and would find themselves in Heaven when they died, but they could not confess Christ.

I remember my Mom telling me one time, “Christians don’t deny Jesus.” What she meant was that it should not be done. However, what my adolescent mind took it to mean was that true believers are unable to deny Christ. Even then I understood that to confess Christ was the opposite of denying him. Thus true Christians would be able to do nothing other than confess, or so I thought. However, these verses in John show that my understanding was wrong. I wish I had been aware of them at the time.

The fact that there are believers who do not confess Christ is no real surprise to our practical sensibilities. The question arises, though, “What are the consequences when a saved person doesn’t confess Christ, or even denies him?” For the answer to that question we will look to Matthew 10:32-39:

“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. [5](#)

In this descriptive set of verses we get the image of a scene playing out in heaven. The setting is important. The fact that it is happening in heaven tells us that everyone there is, likewise, in heaven. That’s a hint to who Jesus is talking about. Since unbelievers won’t be allowed into the kingdom of heaven, He is talking about believers here.

He shows that there is a great reward for those who confess Christ. The reward is Jesus’ publicly announced approval when “him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” Can you image the awesome experience of having Christ confess you as a faithful friend to his Father. What a reward that will be.

There is, however, a warning of consequence in the following verse. For the one who denies Christ before men a shameful reception awaits. Jesus isn’t going to sugar coat it. He’s going to tell God the Father the truth and proclaim the believer to be one who didn’t confess. The word “deny” here has a double meaning. Christ will not only shame the believer verbally, but he will deny him the right to reward and rulership in the kingdom of Heaven. There is a great consequence for the one who doesn’t confess Christ. He will be present in Heaven, which means he will be saved, but he will suffer loss in Heaven. [6](#)

We find this same concept echoed in Luke 9:26, but with an added dimension:

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. [7](#)

So you thought you could get away with being silent. Jesus shows that even the internal emotion that one has toward Christ will be reflected back toward him when that believer arrives in Heaven. Although being ashamed of Christ and his words is an inward status, it implies that there will be outward signs. One of those signs will be that the person won't confess Christ, and thus Christ won't confess that believer. For the one who goes through life pretending he isn't a believer, there is shame waiting for him in heaven. Once again we find a very similar statement later on in the same gospel but with yet another dimension. Let's look at Luke 12:8-9:

“Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. [8](#)

As in the last verse, Jesus will deny the silent believer in front of the angels of God. It's as if there will be a parade of honor for the ones who confess Christ, but a walk of shame for the ones who don't confess. God and the angels will get to see who was faithful to Christ, not only in their heart but with their mouth.

In another place Paul gives us a very important encouragement to confess Christ. It's not only important for our reception into heaven but it's invaluable to our current life. We must confess Christ with our mouths in order to be saved from the consequences of sin in this life. Let's look at Romans 10:9-10 to see how:

...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. [9](#)

Here we must ask, “Saved from what?” Paul is reiterating the idea that being delivered from the deadly consequences of sin, which he calls God's

wrath, can be done only if these two conditions are met. For more information on how we know this is not talking about salvation from Hell, see chapter 26.

Obviously the person needs to be a believer first. Then all believers have the option to confess publicly the Lord Jesus and believe in Jesus' resurrection. If this is accomplished then the believer can expect to be delivered (saved) from the damage that sin causes. The implication in the chapter is that the action of confession is a catalyst for lifestyle change.

It's like "putting your money where your mouth is." The believer who wants to grow out of living by the flesh [10](#) should start with confessing that Christ is his master and grow into full commitment in discipleship. The more one confesses Jesus to peers the more accountability and expectation there will be. Confession is key to avoiding failure in discipleship. You can remember this simple line: disciples confess for success.

In this chapter we learned that believing in Christ and confessing Christ are not the same thing. Believing in Christ is the one requirement for having salvation from Hell. Confessing Christ is not a requirement for eternal salvation, but it is a must for any who want a good reception in heaven, and who wish to grow in discipleship.

THIRTY-ONE:

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In this chapter we will explore the difference between the phrase “Believe in Christ” and “Call on the Name of the Lord.” It would be easy to lump these terms together as if they mean the same thing, but we will find that one corresponds to salvation, while the other to discipleship. Let’s start by looking at John 6:40:

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” ¹

As we’ve seen so many times in this book, Jesus affirms that salvation comes by belief in him. This verse in particular carries a significance for those who try to teach that salvation requires works. This is Jesus’ response to a group of people who wanted to know what actions they needed to perform to do the works of God. Since they were unbelievers, he gave them the first and foremost instruction from God. God’s mission is that,

“everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life.” For those who don’t yet believe, this is the will of God for their life.

However, once their salvation is established, there are other hopes and desires that Jesus has for the life of the believer. Salvation comes by grace and not by works. Though, if the believer wants to be a committed disciple, there are many things he must do as he obeys Christ on a daily basis.

One of the instructions that is given to those who seek to escape the deadly damage of sin in this life is to call upon the name of the Lord. Let’s see how Paul puts it in Romans 10:13-15:

For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” [2](#)

It would be easy to take this verse out of its context. In fact, many have by claiming that Paul is talking about salvation from Hell. However, we need to ask what Paul is talking about here. Our question ought to be “saved from what?”

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” is a direct quote from Joel 2:32. It comes at the end of chapter 2 when Joel has been describing a coming destruction that would descend upon Israel. It would be a physical destruction where a physical army would invade. It describes how the armies would come into the city and climb over the walls. It happened in actual history. So when Joel says, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” we know that he means, “saved from physical destruction, and defeat.” It was a specific promise to Israel in which their repentance and willingness to call out to God would save them from the armies they faced.

The phrase shows up again in Acts 2:21, just days after the time when the Jews had rejected their Messiah. Peter quotes a longer section of the verses from Joel, where he identifies, once again, that Israel has the option of being saved from coming destruction. From the time that Peter gave this speech, there were only about 37 years before Jerusalem would be destroyed. So, once again, like in Joel’s time, Israel was facing a judgment of destruction. Peter gives new meaning to the phrase, “call upon the name of the Lord,” though. This time he shows that it’s actually Jesus the Messiah upon whom they must call, in order to avoid destruction. The promise he offers is that if Israel would call upon the name of the Lord, Jesus would save them from the coming destruction, likely by ushering in the long-

awaited kingdom. They, however, didn't do that and the threat of destruction continued to linger.

That brings us to the Romans 10 passage that we started with. Once again, Paul quotes Joel 2:32. It shouldn't surprise you to find out that he does so in the context of discussion about the Jews. The entire section is about how the Jews have rejected their Messiah, Jesus. He wishes that they would call upon God's Messiah so that they wouldn't have to face the destruction that awaits. This fits in with what we have learned about the book of Romans already, that it is about how to be saved from temporal wrath. For more info on that see chapter 26 of this book. Paul wants the Jews to be saved from the destruction of God's wrath. Paul broadens the perspective in the previous verse when he says, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him." ³

With that, he points out that the principle applies to everyone, not just Jews. The Jews can be rescued from destruction by calling upon the name of Lord, and Gentiles also can be rescued from the destruction of sin if they call upon the name of the Lord. Now with that context, let's read Romans 10:13-15:

For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? ⁴

Notice the progression here. (4) There must be preachers sent to the unbelievers. (3) Then the unbelievers will hear the message. (2) Then some will believe [and have everlasting life.] (1) Then those who have believed have the opportunity to call upon the name of the Lord [to be saved from destruction].

Paul specifically says that believing comes before calling upon the name of the Lord. We've seen dozens of examples stating that it's believing in Christ that brings eternal salvation. Since he shows that one follows the other, we know they are not the same thing. Calling upon the name of the Lord is something that only believers can do. It's an action, or a good work. Therefore, calling upon the name of the Lord is a work of discipleship not a requirement for salvation from Hell.

We can see this in Acts 22:16 where we read:

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’ [5](#)

Here, Paul is explaining what was expected of him after he was converted. At this point he was already a believer. He had believed in Christ for eternal life, but he was waiting to be called into service by God. Obviously his salvation was secure by faith alone, but in order to be a disciple in good standing with God, he had to get baptized, which is true of all disciples.

He also needed to call upon the name of the Lord, which would wash away his sins. This should not be understood as a requirement for positional forgiveness. For more information on positional forgiveness see chapter 20. Paul had the kind of forgiveness that got him into heaven when he believed in Jesus. Yet, he still needed to gain the forgiveness that leads to fellowship with Christ. It was probably difficult for him to call upon the name of the Lord since he had persecuted the early church so severely. However, it would be a requirement for him to be used in ministry. God’s specific discipleship plan for Paul was that he get baptized and call upon the name of the Lord to wash away the bad blood that had been between him and Christ.

There is another sense in which this statement should also be understood. God told him to get baptized. Does someone baptize themselves? Obviously not. For Paul to be baptized, he had to seek out some other believer to baptize him. The difficulty was that Paul had persecuted the church so severely that anyone who was willing to baptize him would likely be afraid of him. Paul had not only sinned against God, but he had sinned tremendously against the church. What’s more, God had just told him, “For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. [6](#)” Paul had work to do that required him to be in good standing with other believers. His sins between himself and God were forgiven, but the sins he had committed against other believers needed to be dealt with. He needed to make things right with the church so that he could start his ministry.

It seems that God was telling him that his public baptism and calling upon the name of the Lord would be part of the proof that other believers needed to see in order to wash away his sins.

In this chapter we have seen the distinction between believing in Christ and calling upon the name of the Lord. The former brings us salvation as the free gift of God. The latter is an action that disciples are expected and commanded to do.

THIRTY-TWO:

B ELIEVE IN C HRIST AND R EPENT

SEE THE VIDEO AT:
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Have you ever heard a gospel presentation that includes repentance? Maybe you've been the recipient of a velvet-haired preacher who says, "Repent to be saved!" I certainly have. In fact, I remember a particular situation at a youth camp years ago. I had been a believer for a few years already but I wasn't exactly clear on the gospel.

The preacher was so savvy that he convinced me that I needed to repent, since I didn't do that when I believed at age six. I remember kneeling on the floor trying my best to think of something to repent of. Tears were streaming down my face, but I couldn't think of anything. I begged the Lord to show me what I needed to repent of. Nothing came. Because I couldn't think of anything, the evangelist convinced me that I might not be saved. He made the strong claim that salvation came by repentance.

After the emotion of the event died down I realized, that I had been duped. A big-voice preacher with an eye patch— that's no joke: he really did have an eye patch— had convinced me that I needed to repent to be saved. After my best efforts to comply, I realized that he was only tugging at my emotions and manipulating me.

We're going to challenge that bad understanding of the gospel in this chapter as we look at the difference between the phrases "believe in Christ," and "repent."

Our first stop on this journey will be John 20:30-31:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these 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. [1](#)

These verses give us a powerful reminder of the single requirement for gaining everlasting life. Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, may have life in His name. As we've seen already in previous chapters, believing in Jesus for the free gift of everlasting life bestows that gift upon the believer. Since we've covered this subject over thirty times in previous chapters, we will let this abbreviated description stand.

Now let's cross over from salvation to discipleship. If we are going to talk about repentance, we need an understanding of what repentance is. The best thing to do is let the Bible define the word for us. For that, let's look at what Jesus said about repentance in the book of Matthew 12:41:

The men of Nineveh ... repented at the preaching of Jonah. [2](#)

Jesus says that what the Ninevites did is to repent. Now all we have to do is go back to Jonah and see what the Ninevites did. Let's take a look at Jonah 3:10 to see the definition of repentance:

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. [3](#)

They turned from their evil way and Jonah 3 defines that as work. So repentance is work. Repentance falls squarely in the category of discipleship. That can be clearly seen by investigating the entire third chapter of Jonah. The section right above this description gives a number of things that the Ninevites did. The passage talks about their work which

Jesus defines as repentance. Here's a list of what their repentance consisted of.

The King arose from his throne.
He removed robes.
He put on sack cloth.
He sat in ashes.
He issued a decree.
The nation fasted.
They refrained from drinking water.
Everything was covered with sack cloth.
They prayed to God.
They turned from their evil way.
They stopped committing violence.

There is no doubt, when you look at this list that repentance is action. Repentance is work. Yet, there are those who say that repentance is just a change of mind. There's a reason why people say that. The definition has leaked into the public consciousness because some try to hold on to the idea that salvation comes by faith in Jesus alone but also that salvation requires repentance.

Those two things can't go together. Repentance is clearly defined by the Old Testament, the New Testament, and by Jesus himself as work. If repentance equals work and salvation comes by faith alone then we must draw a dividing line. Paul said that we are saved, not of works. Repentance is work.

Let's look once more at the verse we discussed earlier in John 20:30-31:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these 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. [4](#)

This is the purpose statement of the Gospel of John. When he says "this book," he is not talking about the whole Bible, of course. He's talking about the book that he wrote, The Gospel of John. The statement is right at the end of his book. He's basically saying, "There's a lot of things I didn't write

down, but I wrote down enough for a specific purpose.” Then he tells us what that specific purpose is. In the next verse he says, “But these 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.”

This is significant for a very particular reason. What he's saying here, in effect, is that if you are on a desert island and all you have is the Gospel of John, you can read it, believe in Him, and have everlasting life. Looking at his statement, there's really no other way to see it. He wrote enough in his gospel that you can read it and have everlasting life. Therefore, the gospel of John is primarily evangelistic. It tells us how to have salvation.

Here is a dilemma that we face. He never once in all of the Gospel of John uses the words “repent” or “repentance.” Think about that for a second. He's basically saying, “This is how you have everlasting life.” He then leaves out repentance. What is the obvious implication? The implication is that the Apostle John does not think that repentance is a condition for gaining everlasting life. Wow!

Maybe you've been lied to or maybe the preacher who told you that was confused or maybe the preacher who told you that was trying to manipulate you. I don't know. All I know is that the Gospel of John does not talk about repentance. It does say that you can have everlasting life by believing in Jesus. Does that mean that repentance is not something we're expected to do? Are we not expected to repent?

Before we go that far, there's another book that John wrote in which the word repentance is found a number of times. The book we're going to look at next is Revelation. The Gospel of John is written to unbelievers with the offer of salvation. The book of Revelation is written to believers, people who had already believed in Jesus. They have everlasting life and are trying to live out their discipleship. That is the context in which we find the word “repentance” from John. Let's look at Revelation 2:1-5:

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write... I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to

you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

[5](#)

He says to the church in Ephesus, “repent and do the first work.” He didn’t use the word at all with unbelievers, but suddenly when he’s talking to believers, John says that they need to repent. He does have the word “repent” in his vocabulary. It’s just not a word he uses when he’s telling unbelievers how to get saved.

What’s more, he shows that there will be consequences if they don’t repent. He lays out those consequences. Nowhere in here does he say that the consequence for not repenting would be a loss of everlasting life. Things can be lost but not salvation. Fellowship with Christ can be lost. Rewards in heaven can be lost. Yet, everlasting life is secure.

Here’s another really famous set of verses from Revelation 3:15, 19:

“I know your works that you are neither hot nor cold.... [6](#) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. [7](#)

Once more, what is repentance? It’s work. These are believers he’s talking to, so they have everlasting life by faith alone in Christ. Their salvation was not by works but then Jesus expects them as believers to do good work. If they get too far off the path he wants them to return by repenting. He says to, “be zealous and repent.” Verse 20 of The following section tells us the benefit for repenting:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. [8](#)

Fellowship with Christ is the benefit of repentance for the believer. For the saved person, falling into sin means falling out of fellowship with Christ. To get back into fellowship, one must repent. If you want the kind of relationship with Jesus where you can sit and talk over a meal, it may include repentance to get there. He goes on to say:

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. [9](#)

The second benefit of repenting has to do with fellowship, but adds to it. For those who seek fellowship he offers a place of honor shared with Him. What could be more intimate than sharing a throne? Jesus offers that to those who can live out a life of committed discipleship. That will sometimes include repentance.

It's important to know that a person who repents is not getting re-saved. If they have believed in Jesus, they can never again be unsaved. Repentance, for the believer, is fully a discipleship issue. It's all about works.

Let's take a look at Luke 24:47:

[R]epentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [10](#)

You probably recognize this famous saying. It is the version of the great commission recorded by Luke. It is, however, not the only version of this teaching by Jesus. When we look at the other instances of this event, [11](#) we find that the great commission is clearly a call to make disciples. Therefore, we find once more that repentance is the work of a disciple.

What's more, we see from this verse that everlasting life is not what is received when someone repents, but remission of sins. This fits well with what we've already learned about 1 John 1:9, where we learned that the disciple needs ongoing daily forgiveness to maintain fellowship with God. For more information on that see chapter 20. Thus, it's clear that this is part of a discipleship message, not an evangelistic one.

Let's look at Acts 2:36-38:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [12](#)

A little context is needed to understand what is going on in these verses. Peter is giving a speech to a large group of Jews. These are the same Jews who, only weeks earlier crucified Jesus. Peter shows them that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah and that they were guilty of the crime.

Toward the end of the speech, Peter quotes Joel chapter 3 to them, claiming that there is destruction awaiting Israel because of this crime. During Peter's talk the people became believers. We know that because it says, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart."

Peter convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah. He won them over. After years of being with Christ, and after all the things they had seen, the apostles were finally coming into their own ministry. Peter's first sermon was a huge success. These people became believers in the Messiah right there on the spot. They then wanted to know what they should do next. They asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Notice what they didn't say. They didn't say, "What shall we do to have everlasting life." They were not asking how to get saved. They were asking about what they should do now that they had salvation. Even though they had just gained everlasting life, the destruction of Israel and the guilt of killing the Messiah still hung over their heads. They wanted to know how to make things right.

Peter's response fits with what we know of repentance. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Once again we see that repentance is something that is required of believers. These Christ-killing Jews were eternally saved, but they also wanted to be disciples. They sought to take the right steps of discipleship, and so Peter points them to repentance and baptism.

All of this leads us to a new understanding. Evangelistic messages that call people to repent are misguided because a person cannot repent before they believe. If someone turns from their sin, they are only able to do so after they've believed in Christ. This is because before someone believes in Christ, their entire life is marked by enmity with God. Only after the person is persuaded that Jesus is the Christ can they make the discipleship decision to repent.

The thing that might be confusing is that a decision to repent often comes soon after a person believes, maybe as little as a second later.

However, be assured that it is not the decision to repent or even the act of repentance that saves the person. It is their belief in Christ alone. The evangelist who mixes repentance into the salvation message is either confused or manipulating his listeners. Anyone who teaches repentance as a means to eternal salvation is teaching a false gospel.

In this chapter we have seen that believing in Christ is the way to salvation. Repentance, on the other hand, is the act of a wayward believer. Sometimes when sin has overtaken the life of the Christian, it is required that they repent to have fellowship with God.

THIRTY-THREE:
T H E G O S P E L O F J O H N A N D T H E E
N T I R E B I B L E .

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I love the Gospel of John. I love it so much that at one time I had the first six chapters memorized. I could recite them straight through, and did publicly once for a church in my area. The gospel of John is so well thought out. It's simple but powerful. It's precise and consistent. The language is controlled so well that a word used at the beginning of the book will still mean the same thing at the end of the book. John limited his vocabulary to about 600 Greek words. Elementary students of biblical Greek first study John because of all of this.

It's not just the style but the content that is amazing. It's not a random smattering of Jesus' actions and sayings. It's a curated collection with a singular purpose. John is so precise in his purpose that he even included a purpose statement in John 20:30-31:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these 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. [1](#)

With these powerful words, John tells us what his gospel is for. It's designed to lead people to salvation. Its specific purpose is that a person can become convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. By believing that, they can have eternal life. That is the salvation message. Although there are themes of discipleship in the Gospel of John, that is not the primary purpose, salvation is.

The Bible is like a tool box in some ways. If someone wants wisdom, they ought to read the works of Solomon. If someone wants to get inspired by the immensity of God, they ought to go through Job's conversations with the Almighty, or David's psalms of praise. If someone wants to know about future events, they ought to read Daniel or Revelation. However, if someone wants to know how to be saved, John's gospel is the single most important place to go. If you are comfortable sending someone to Proverbs for wisdom, then you ought not balk at the idea of sending them to John for salvation. You wouldn't use a screw driver to drive a nail if you had a hammer available. So, we ought to use the tool that John made available to us when we are doing evangelism.

I have often proposed this idea and it has been met with debate. The one who opposes may say, "I prefer to consider the whole counsel of scripture." I usually think, but don't say, "Matthew 27:5 says Judas hanged himself... and Jesus said, 'go and do likewise' in Luke 10:37." However, we don't go hang ourselves because we understand that that is a misuse of the Bible. We acknowledge that the Bible is meant to be used a certain way. We understand that certain books are used for certain purposes. John tells us what his purpose is.

Trying to lead someone to gain salvation with some book other than John's Gospel is like using that screwdriver to drive a nail. It might be done, but it's not the best way. John intends his gospel to be a stand alone work that someone who knows nothing about Jesus can read and get salvation. A person can go from zero to immortal by reading and believing what's in the Gospel of John. In that sense, it stands above all of the rest of scripture for the purpose of evangelism.

This brings up a valuable question. What is the purpose of the rest of the Bible? We already said that other biblical books have specific purposes, but

is there an overall category that the rest of the Bible can fit into? Yes, there is. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us what it is.

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. ²

This could be called the purpose statement for the whole Bible. Do you notice any important words that might indicate what category the rest of the Bible falls into? The statement ends with, “that the man of God may be... equipped for every good work.” Good works are always connected to discipleship.

Therefore, the entire Bible has the purpose of equipping people for discipleship. In fact, even the Gospel of John fits this category. The gospel of John can strengthen and encourage the disciple, even though its primary purpose is evangelism.

Yet, the whole Bible is designed for discipleship, while only the Gospel of John is designed specifically for evangelism. In other words, the purpose statement of the whole Bible applies to John, but the purpose statement of John does not apply to the whole Bible. Deuteronomy is not a good place to go to explain the free gift of eternal life. Even Matthew, Mark, and Luke are not focused on evangelism, but instead discipleship. That’s because most of Jesus’ ministry was focused on discipleship, and teaching his disciples to be disciple makers. That’s why it was required for John to hand-pick instances in which Jesus explained salvation specifically. Without John’s gospel we would have a very hard time understanding what salvation is. However, we would have a good idea of what discipleship is, since the whole Bible is devoted to it.

This means that unbelievers should first read John. If they become believers, then they should continue to read John and begin to read the rest of the Bible. Until someone has believed, John should be the focus. That’s why, in my apologetics ministry, I always focus primarily on verses from John. That is the first stop on the journey to belief and thus salvation.

As we’ve seen, not only in this chapter but this whole book as well, Salvation and Discipleship have a clear distinction between them. Until my attention was drawn to the distinction, I did not understand the Bible hardly at all. It’s the awareness of this distinction that brought the Bible alive for

me. This just didn't make sense until I saw the difference between salvation and discipleship.

I can't thank you enough for reading this book. I hope and pray that the information here will lead to a better understanding of what the Bible has to say, both about gaining salvation and living in discipleship. If you haven't yet believed in Jesus for eternal life, I hope that you will soon. If you are a believer, I hope you will accept the mission of committed discipleship. There is a great reward for those who do, both in this life and the life to come.

Notes

One: Free and Costly

[1. *The New King James Version*](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ro 6:23. All following biblical references will be from the New King James Translation unless otherwise stated.

[2.](#) Revelation 22:17

[3.](#) Luke 14:26-33

Two: Water and Food

[1.](#) John 4:7-14

[2.](#) John 4:10

[3.](#) John 3:16B

[4.](#) John 4:14

[5.](#) John 4:28-36

[6.](#) John 4:34

[7.](#) John 4:38

[8.](#) John 4:36

Three: Believe In Jesus as Savior, and Obey Jesus as Lord

[1.](#) John 4:41–42

[2.](#) John 3:16-17, 3:36, 5:24, 6:47

[3.](#) John 11:25-27

[4.](#) John 4:41–42

[5.](#) Luke 6:46.

[6.](#) Matthew 28:19–20

[7.](#) Matthew 28:19

[8.](#) Luke 14:26-33

[9.](#) Matthew 28:19–20

[10.](#) Ibid.

Four: Faith and Works

- [1.](#) Ephesians 2:8-9
- [2.](#) John 3:16
- [3.](#) Ephesians 2:10
- [4.](#) Ephesians 2:10

Five: Grace and Works

- [1.](#) Romans 11:6

Six: Relationship With God and Fellowship With God

- [1.](#) John 1:12
- [2.](#) 1 John 1:3
- [3.](#) 1 John 1:9
- [4.](#) John 3:16, 3:36, 5:24, 6:47, 11:25-27

Seven: Born Again and Grow

- [1.](#) John 3:3
- [2.](#) John 3:6
- [3.](#) John 3:16
- [4.](#) Robert N. Wilkin, “The Gospel according to John,” in The Grace New Testament Commentary, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 374.
- [5.](#) 1 John 5:1
- [6.](#) 1 Peter 2:2
- [7.](#) Ephesians 4:14-16

Eight: Child of God and Friend of God

- [1.](#) John 1:12
- [2.](#) John 15:14–15
- [3.](#) James 4:4

Nine: Believe in Christ and Love Christ

- [1.](#) John 3:16
- [2.](#) John 1:12, 3:36, 5:24, 6:47
- [3.](#) John 14:15–21
- [4.](#) John 6:64
- [5.](#) Acts 1:25
- [6.](#) Romans 8:7
- [7.](#) Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:21

Ten: Know God and Know God

- [1.](#) John 17:3
- [2.](#) John 17:3
- [3.](#) John 14:9
- [4.](#) John 6:64
- [5.](#) John 2:11
- [6.](#) 1 John 2:3
- [7.](#) 1 John 2:3
- [8.](#) 1 John 1:3
- [9.](#) 1 John 4:7–8
- [10.](#) 1 John 4:7
- [11.](#) 1 John 2:11, 3:10b, 3:15, 4:20
- [12.](#) John 3:3
- [13.](#) 1 John 4:7–8
- [14.](#) Romans 5:10, Colossians 2:21

Eleven: Faith in Christ for Everlasting Life and Faith In Christ for Daily Life

- [1.](#) John 6:47
- [2.](#) Galations 2:20
- [3.](#) Galations 2:20
- [4.](#) Galations 2:20

Twelve: Believe in Christ and Abide in Christ

- [1.](#) John 3:18
- [2.](#) John 8:30
- [3.](#) John 8:30–32
- [4.](#) John 4:40
- [5.](#) John 8:30–32
- [6.](#) John 8:34–36

- [7.](#) John 15:5
- [8.](#) Ibid.
- [9.](#) Ephesians 2:8-9
- [10.](#) 1 Corinthians 3:14–15
- [11.](#) 1 John 3:24
- [12.](#) John 15:8
- [13.](#) John 15:14
- [14.](#) John 15:5
- [15.](#) John 15:7
- [16.](#) John 15:8
- [17.](#) John 15:11
- [18.](#) John 15:15
- [19.](#) John 15:18
- [20.](#) John 15:20

Thirteen: Eternal Life and Eternal Life Abiding

- [1.](#) John 3:36
- [2.](#) 1 John 3:15
- [3.](#) John 13:34
- [4.](#) 1 John 3:14
- [5.](#) 1 John 3:14
- [6.](#) 1 John 3:15
- [7.](#) John 15:5
- [8.](#) 1 John 5:20

Fourteen: White Throne Judgment and The Judgment Seat Of Christ

- [1.](#) John 5:24
- [2.](#) Revelation 20:10
- [3.](#) Revelation 20:11
- [4.](#) Revelation 20:12
- [5.](#) Revelation 20:13
- [6.](#) John 5:25
- [7.](#) Luke 16:19-31
- [8.](#) John 5:29
- [9.](#) Revelation 20:10–15
- [10.](#) Romans 3:20
- [11.](#) Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27
- [12.](#) Matthew 10:15
- [13.](#) John 5:24
- [14.](#) 2 Corinthians 5:10
- [15.](#) John 5:24
- [16.](#) Dwight L. Hunt, “The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 786.

[17.](#) 1 Corinthians 3:11–17

[18.](#) 1 Corinthians 3:11–17

Fifteen: Eternal Life and Eternal Rewards

[1.](#) Revelation 22:17

[2.](#) John 1:12, 3:16, 36, 5:24, 6:47

[3.](#) John 4:10-15

[4.](#) Revelation 22:12–13

[5.](#) Ephesians 2:8-9

Sixteen: Eternal Life as a Gift and Eternal Life as a Reward

[1.](#) Romans 6:23

[2.](#) Revelation 22:17, Ephesians 2:8-9

[3.](#) John 11:26, 5:24, 6:47

[4.](#) Mark 10:29–31

[5.](#) Mark 10:21

[6.](#) Matthew 19:27

[7.](#) Mark 8:29

[8.](#) Mark 10:29–31

[9.](#) 1 Timothy 6:12

[10.](#) 1 Timothy 6:19

[11.](#) John 6:47, 5:24

Seventeen: Enter the Kingdom and Inherit the Kingdom

[1.](#) John 3:3–5

[2.](#) John 3:5

[3.](#) Galatians 5:19–21

[4.](#) Galatians 5:19–21

[5.](#) John 1:12, 3:16, 36, 5:34, 6:47, 11:26

[6.](#) Galatians 5:19–21

[7.](#) Colosians 3:23–24

Eighteen: Heirs of God and Fellow Heirs with Christ

[1.](#) Romans 8:17 Translation by: Zane C. Hodges, [*Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*](#), ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 224.

- [2.](#) Deuteronomy 21:17
- [3.](#) John 1:12
- [4.](#) Romans 8:15 Translated by: Zane C. Hodges, [Romans: Deliverance from Wrath](#), ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 221.
- [5.](#) Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ro 8:15.
- [6.](#) Romans 8:17 Translation by: Zane C. Hodges, [Romans: Deliverance from Wrath](#), ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 224.
- [7.](#) John 15:18
- [8.](#) John 15:20
- [9.](#) Romans 8:17 Translation by: Zane C. Hodges, [Romans: Deliverance from Wrath](#), ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 224.
- [10.](#) Romans 8:17
- [11.](#) Philippians 2:9-10
- [12.](#) Romans 8:29
- [13.](#) Romans 8:18

Nineteen: Black Darkness and Darkness Outside

- [1.](#) Jude 12–13
- [2.](#) Jude 5–6
- [3.](#) Matthew 8:10–12
- [4.](#) Matthew 13:37–38
- [5.](#) Matthew 8:10–12
- [6.](#) Matthew 8:10–12
- [7.](#) Matthew 8:10–12
- [8.](#) John 3:3,5
- [9.](#) Matthew 8:10–12
- [10.](#) Matthew 25:14–30
- [11.](#) John 11:13
- [12.](#) Job 16:9
- [13.](#) 1 Corinthians 3:15
- [14.](#) Revelation 21:4
- [15.](#) Matthew 22:2–14

Twenty: Positional Forgiveness and Daily Forgiveness

- [1.](#) Colossians 1:13–14
- [2.](#) Colossians 1:13–14
- [3.](#) John 5:24
- [4.](#) 1 Peter 3:18, Romans 6:10
- [5.](#) Hebrews 10:10
- [6.](#) John 19:30
- [7.](#) 1 John 2:12
- [8.](#) 1 John 1:9

- [9.](#) Matthew 6:11–12
- [10.](#) Matthew 6:11–12
- [11.](#) Luke 11:4

Twenty-One: Take a Bath and Wash Your Feet

- [1.](#) John 13:5–10
- [2.](#) John 13:5–10
- [3.](#) Mark 8:29, John 6:68, John 6:47
- [4.](#) See the previous chapter for an explanation of positional forgiveness.
- [5.](#) See the previous chapter for an explanation of daily forgiveness.
- [6.](#) 1 John 1:9

Twenty-Two: Positional Sanctification and Practical Sanctification

- [1.](#) 1 Corinthians 1:2
- [2.](#) Dwight L. Hunt, “[The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians,](#)” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 711.
- [3.](#) John 5:24
- [4.](#) John 17:17–19
- [5.](#) 2 Timothy 2:20–21
- [6.](#) Ephesians 2:10

Twenty-Three: Justified by Faith and Justified by Works.

- [1.](#) Romans 3:20
- [2.](#) Romans 3:28
- [3.](#) Romans 4:5
- [4.](#) Genesis 15:6, Galatians 3:6, Romans 4:3
- [5.](#) Romans 4:2
- [6.](#) Jeremiah 17:10
- [7.](#) Zane C. Hodges, “[The Epistle of James,](#)” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1121.
- [8.](#) Matthew 19:21
- [9.](#) James 2:21–24
- [10.](#) Isaiah 41:8
- [11.](#) 2 Chronicles 20:7; Is. 41:8, James 2:21–24
- [12.](#) John 15:14–15
- [13.](#) James 4:4

Twenty-Four: Positional Righteousness and Practical Righteousness

- [1.](#) Romans 4:5
- [2.](#) Romans 4:24
- [3.](#) Romans 6:1–2
- [4.](#) 1 Corinthians 3:15
- [5.](#) 1 Timothy 6:11

Twenty-Five: Spirit Baptism and Water Baptism

- [1.](#) 1 Corinthians 12:13
- [2.](#) Corinthians 12:27
- [3.](#) Galatians 3:26–27
- [4.](#) John 1:12, 3:16, 3:36, 5:24, 6:47, 11:26
- [5.](#) Matthew 28:19–20
- [6.](#) Craig S. Keener, [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mt 28:19–20.

Twenty-Six: Saved from Condemnation and Saved From Wrath

- [1.](#) Robert N. Wilkin, “[The Ten Most Misunderstood Words In the Bible,](#)” (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 33.
- [2.](#) John 3:17–18
- [3.](#) Romans 1:18
- [4.](#) Romans 3:23–24
- [5.](#) Ephesians 2:8–9
- [6.](#) René A. López, “[The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans,](#)” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 626.
- [7.](#) Romans 1:18, 2:5, 8, and 3:5
- [8.](#) Ephesians 5:6, Colossians 3:6
- [9.](#) Zane C. Hodges, [Romans: Deliverance from Wrath,](#) ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 36.
- [10.](#) William Barclay, [The Letter to the Romans,](#) 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 30.
- [11.](#) Romans 1:24, 26, 28
- [12.](#) Romans 5:9 - Weymouth New Testament
- [13.](#) Romans 5:9–10
Translated by Zane C. Hodges, [Romans: Deliverance from Wrath,](#) ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 143.
- [14.](#) Zane C. Hodges, [Romans: Deliverance from Wrath,](#) ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 141.
- [15.](#) Romans 6:4
- [16.](#) Romans 8:5,8

Twenty-Seven: Saved From The Wrath To Come and Saved From Wrath

- [1.](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:10
- [2.](#) 1 Thessalonians 1:8
- [3.](#) 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18
- [4.](#) John 5:25, 28
- [5.](#) Matthew 24:31
- [6.](#) 1 Thessalonians 5:1–4
- [7.](#) 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10
- [8.](#) 1 Corinthians 15:5–15
- [9.](#) Romans 1:18
- [10.](#) Romans 1:16
- [11.](#) Romans 5:9–10

Twenty-Eight: Saved Without Works and Saved With Works

- [1.](#) Acts 16:30–31
- [2.](#) James 1:21
- [3.](#) Genesis 19:17, 32:30, 1 Samuel 19:11, Jer 48:6, Mark 3:4, Luke 6:9
- [4.](#) Douglas J. Moo, [James: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 16, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 85.
- [5.](#) James 1:2
- [6.](#) James 1:12
- [7.](#) James 5:19–20
- [8.](#) James 2:14
- [9.](#) Philippians 2:12
- [10.](#) Philippians 1:17
- [11.](#) Philippians 1:28
- [12.](#) Philippians 3:2, 18–19
- [13.](#) Gregory P. Sapaugh, [“The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians,”](#) in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 898.

Twenty-Nine: Saved From Hell and Saving The Life

- [1.](#) Ephesians 2:8–9
- [2.](#) J. B. Bond, “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians,” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 868.
- [3.](#) Revelation 20:15
- [4.](#) Matthew 16:24–26. (HCSB)

Thirty: Believe in Christ and Confess Christ

- [1.](#) John 11:25–26
- [2.](#) Philippians 2:11
- [3.](#) John 12:42
- [4.](#) John 6:47
- [5.](#) Matthew 10:32–33
- [6.](#) 1 Corinthians 3:15
- [7.](#) Luke 9:26
- [8.](#) Luke 12:8–9
- [9.](#) Romans 10:9
- [10.](#) Romans 8

Thirty-One: Believe in Christ and Call on the Name of the Lord

- [1.](#) John 6:40
- [2.](#) Romans 10:13
- [3.](#) Romans 10:12
- [4.](#) Romans 10:13–15
- [5.](#) Acts 22:16
- [6.](#) Acts 22:15

Thirty-Two: Believe in Christ and Repent

- [1.](#) John 20:30–31
- [2.](#) Matthew 12:41
- [3.](#) John 3:10
- [4.](#) John 20:30–31
- [5.](#) Revelation 2:1–5
- [6.](#) Revelation 3:15
- [7.](#) Revelation 3:19
- [8.](#) Revelation 3:20
- [9.](#) Revelation 3:21
- [10.](#) Luke 24:47
- [11.](#) Matthew 28:18–20
- [12.](#) Acts 2:36–38

Thirty-Three: The Gospel of John and the Entire Bible.

- [1.](#) John 20:30–31
- [2.](#) 2 Timothy 3:16–17