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ministries®

MARCH 20, 2023

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FOCUSED ON THE WORD

Is Salvation by Faith Alone in Christ Alone?



"Dawn: Luther at Erfurt" by Sir Joseph Noel Paton, National Galleries of Scotland

In this study I would like to dig into one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. It will lend great light on the historic arguments regarding the doctrine of salvation: is justification from our sin accomplished by faith alone, or is something needed in addition? This subject has been a controversial one throughout Church history and remains so today. What do you believe regarding how a person is saved and why?

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

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 - Steve Womack AR
 - Rudy Yakym IN
 - Ted Yoho FL

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

Governors: Fridays 9am (EST), Zoom

Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff: Fridays 9am (EST), Zoom

Senate Members: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served

House Members: Thursdays 8am, AG Hearing Rm., Longworth 1302, hot breakfast served

The views expressed in each Bible study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible study sponsor.



CapMin Recruiting Bible Teachers



Twelve men have applied to become CapMin Bible teachers to their local elected officials at MPact Montana, an annual Southern Baptist Convention conference that was held March 4–5 in Helena.

CapMin hosted a booth at the conference to greet pastors and lay leaders and introduce them to our mission to create disciples of Jesus Christ in the political arena throughout the world. Participating in the conference marked the kickoff of Capitol Ministries’ year-long effort to recruit Bible teachers for Local Government Ministries, an initiative to establish discipleship Bible-study based ministries to city and county political leaders in neighborhoods across America.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As we survey the Scriptures in pursuit of an answer to what they teach regarding our salvation, I will rely on basic hermeneutic principles of interpretation. What do I mean by that? What are hermeneutic principles? Let me draw some parallels. Whereas pilots, doctors, and lawyers follow strict procedures to execute properly the disciplines of their profession, so must the interpreter of a document. Whereas the former disciplines are aeronautics, medicine, and law respectively, the latter is that of interpretive rules or hermeneutics.

One of the most basic, fundamental rules of hermeneutics in the study of the Bible is the principle known as *analogia scriptura*. Lest I quickly lose you, that means the student must assume that a document does not contradict itself, unless it proves itself otherwise. The interpreter must assume the document is innocent until proven guilty of contradiction. God’s Word does not contradict itself is the presupposition premise; the Bible is in total harmony without contradiction or conflict. Another way of stating *analogia scriptura* is that Scripture interprets Scripture. Further understood, the more specific and/or easier-to-understand passages of wide concurrence must inform and interpret the lesser specific or understood passages. Again, the benefit of the doubt is always on the side of the document’s integrity and harmony until proven otherwise.

Those principles need to guide our analysis in pursuit of the answer to our proposed question: *Is salvation by faith alone in Christ alone?* Can the interpreter of Scripture harmonize every passage in the Bible that pertains to this subject? I think you will see that the answer to that question is yes! The few passages that

seem to suggest that salvation is by faith plus works, in fact, are in harmony with the overwhelming number of passages that state salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Having prefaced this study with this explanation, let us examine Ephesians 2:8–9, our primary passage for this week.

II. THE SUBJECT

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Without wading into the complex details of the Greek language structure of this passage and losing you before making conclusions, please allow me to paraphrase it at the beginning of this study. What the Apostle Paul is communicating to the believers at the church in Ephesus is this: *For by grace you have been saved through faith* [and even that faith is not from yourselves; it, too, is the gift of God]; *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

What Paul states to the Ephesians about the biblically revealed formula of salvation is in prose of classic contrast construction. Salvation is not based on man’s efforts, but rather, on God’s graciousness. As we shall examine in survey form throughout what follows, this is the singular answer, i.e., the *analogia scriptura* that resonates throughout all the pages of Scripture! Again, we can harmonize the several passages in the Bible that we might think are in seeming contradiction to this overwhelming singular voice of God’s Word relative to this particular subject. This we will do under the fourth point of my outline titled “The Suspect.”



III. THE SURVEY

The basis of salvation is a major doctrinal issue requiring essential clarity: this study is aimed at helping you to ascertain what you believe about your own salvation and if it squares with God's Word or not. What follows is a biblical survey of pertinent passages, allowing the compendium of analogous Scripture to speak for itself.

I will intentionally overwhelm you with the number of passages that essentially say the same thing. I know of no other way to make my point with as much persuasion.

Note my comments along the way that are intended to help you better understand what the passage is saying.

A. GENESIS 15:6

Then he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. Here in the Old Testament (OT) is the formula of salvation. There is no mention of good works. Notwithstanding, years later Abraham was willing to offer Isaac, displaying the genuineness of his faith by his obedience to God (by his works). Important to our question of *Is Salvation by Faith Alone in Christ Alone?* it must be noted that Abraham's good works were not a part of God's pronouncement that Abraham was declaratively righteous in his standing before Him. Critically important, Abraham was reckoned righteous singularly based on faith (cf. James 2:20–23; Hebrews 11:17–19; Romans 4:3).

B. HABAKKUK 2:4

“Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the

righteous will live by his faith.” One of the main emphases of this OT book is that the proud trust in themselves, their self-effort or works, whereas the humble live by faith, trusting in God. This simple biblical contrast surfaces repeatedly throughout the entire Bible.

C. MATTHEW 1:21

“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” The name *Jesus* (Jeshua in Hebrew) actually means “Savior.” *Christ* (*Christos*) in Greek means “anointed one.” In essence, *Jesus'* God-given name (cf. Luke 1:30–31) encompasses His God-anointed mission—to save people from their sins. Fundamentally expressed herein, salvation, then, is through a person, not a system. *Jesus'* name itself implies that salvation is achieved by God's doing versus man's efforts.

D. MATTHEW 18:3B–4

“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” This Scripture is a beautiful characterization of salvation. Why? How does this relate to the question in the title of this week's study? Children have no resources, accomplishments, or self-merit to offer God; rather, it is their helpless, dependent humility and trust that Jesus commends, warranting salvation.

E. MARK 1:14B–15

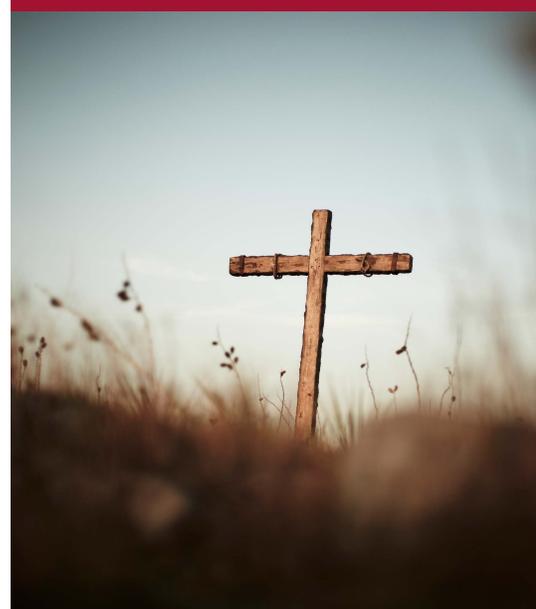
Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” The two ingredients necessary for

VERSE OF THE WEEK



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 as a result of works, so that no one may boast.



Salvation is not based on man's efforts but rather, on God's graciousness.





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At the conference, pastors and lay leaders participated in sessions on building relational skills, community outreach, and church revitalization. Montana Baptists' goals include developing strong and healthy churches that are reaching their communities and developing mature Christ followers, planting new churches where they are needed most, and reaching the next generation of ministry leaders in Montana. Capitol Ministries' mission aligns perfectly with these goals. In this year-long effort, Capitol Ministries is challenging churches to find and develop leaders who will reach their local public servants for Christ and disciple them into mature faith through in-depth, weekly, expositional Bible studies.

Torrey Lewis, our Local Government Ministry leader in Hillsboro, Oregon, and Jon Cassel, Global Director for Africa, shared our mission with over 45 people. Also representing CapMin was Pastor Michael Johnson of Big Sky Fellowship, and our ministry leader in the Montana Capitol. Pastor Johnson has already built significant relationships within this organization. We estimate that a quarter of the people we met had heard of Capitol Ministries and were thankful for our work.

salvation listed by Jesus are *repent and believe in the gospel*. Important to note from other passages is this: both *repentance* and *belief* are in and of themselves *gifts* from God! Acts 11:18 evidences this truth: *When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."* God, then, is the One Who generates repentance in the heart of the individual. Note additionally 2 Timothy 2:25 with this idea in mind: *With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.* Nowhere does Jesus mention human works as being a part of the salvation equation—even the act of *repentance* is born from above in the heart of the individual.

F. LUKE 6:20

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Jesus' concern for the materially poor is one of Luke's favorite themes, but here Jesus is speaking about much more than physical poverty; He is speaking about spiritual poverty (cf. Matthew 5:3). An individual's personal bankruptcy—the admission that he is not able to save himself by his own good works, Jesus says, is a necessary precursor for salvation. Much to the contrary, human meritorious works portend an attitude of pride, not personal poverty. The *poor in spirit* are the ones who are saved, not the proud in spirit. Keep in mind our home passage at this point: Ephesians 2:8–9 concludes with *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

G. LUKE 23:42–43

And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." The thief on the cross next to Jesus realized he had no possibility for eternal life except for and by God's immediate divine grace and intervention. The thief on the cross had no time to perform human works. In fact, it was impossible for him to perform human works, thus revealing the mind of Jesus on the matter—good works were not required in Jesus' granting salvation to the thief.

H. JOHN 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." In this all-familiar passage, the operative word for gaining eternal life is *believes*, not personal works.

I. ACTS 2:38

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...." Herein is the first sermon preached after the ascension of Christ. Most important to gain from this passage is this: again, *repentance* is an essential ingredient relative to salvation. It means, "to turn about-face, or 180 degrees." And again, per Acts 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:25, repentance itself is a gift from God:

**Think of the faith
necessary for salvation
and the repentance
necessary for salvation as
two sides of the same coin:
both are gifts from God.**

After personal salvation is received by faith alone, a public identification with Christ through the waters of baptism results. Again, notice the omission of



any prerequisite of personal works. Best understood both contextually and grammatically, this passage means that because of the forgiveness of your sins, you need be baptized.

J. ROMANS 1:16–17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” The word *salvation* (*soteria*) means “deliverance, preservation or rescue from danger and apprehension.” When rereading the passage, notice Who initiates and is responsible for this action: *it is the power of God* [not man] *for salvation*. Furthermore, the recipient’s only prerequisite to obtain salvation is *belief*; nowhere are personal meritorious works in view in this declarative statement pertaining to a person’s salvation. Summarily, *the righteousness of God is revealed*, or given to individuals, based on *faith*. Lastly, note that this passage closes by incorporating Habakkuk 2:4, the passage already examined: expressly displaying that Paul is also making his point by the use of *analogia scriptura*.

K. ROMANS 3:20

Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. In the book of Romans, Paul is presenting God’s plan for salvation. In this particular portion of his presentation, he is arguing that the OT law was never intended to save someone—as though by keeping it or by performing human works a person might be found worthy in God’s eyes. Conversely, and per the passage that follows, he

incorporates the OT law to make exactly the opposite point.

L. GALATIANS 3:24

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. Tutors in the time of Christ were strict disciplinarians, oftentimes slaves, who were assigned the responsibility of bringing up their master’s children. Kids longed for freedom from their *tutors*. Similar to the way a *tutor* uses discipline, God is using the law to show us our sin and escort us to Christ.

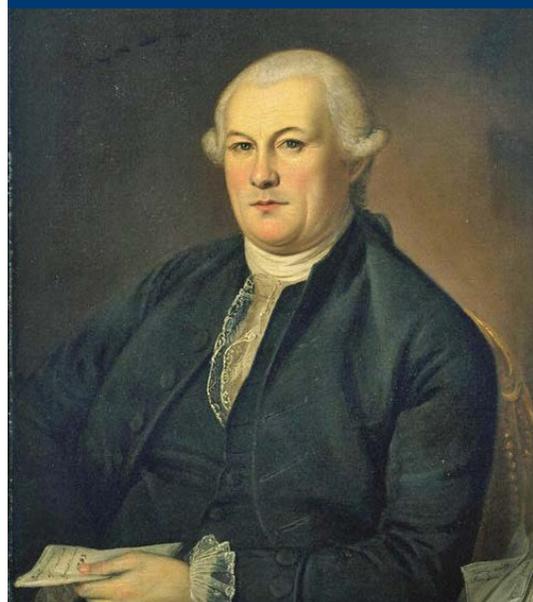
The intent of the law in both the OT and the NT was never to save; rather, it brightly illuminates our failure to be able to live up to it and, therefore, our need for a Savior.

With the personal realization that I am incapable of keeping it (see Matthew 5), the law points me to Christ for salvation. Clearly then, justification is by faith, not by the law or personal works.

M. ROMANS 3:24

Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. The word for *justified* in Greek means “to declare righteous.” The passage expressly states that such a declaration is both a *gift* and the *gift... in Christ Jesus*. Further, the Greek word for *redemption*, which derives its meaning from the slave market, meant “to pay the necessary ransom in order to assure a slave’s freedom.” This powerful picture informs the biblical doctrine of salvation! Putting the two words together clearly indicates that salvation is a *gift* by and from the *grace* of God

Elias Boudinot



“Let us enter on this important business under the idea that we are Christians on whom the eyes of the world are now turned ... [L]et us earnestly call and beseech Him, for Christ’s sake, to preside in our councils. ... We can only depend on the all powerful influence of the Spirit of God, Whose Divine aid and assistance it becomes us as a Christian people most devoutly to implore. Therefore I move that some minister of the Gospel be requested to attend this Congress every morning ... in order to open the meeting with prayer.”

— Elias Boudinot, president of Congress, signed the Peace Treaty to End the American Revolution, first attorney admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court Bar, framer of the Bill of Rights, director of the U.S. Mint.

Elias Boudinot, *The Life, Public Services, Addresses, and Letters of Elias Boudinot, J.* J. Boudinot, editor (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1896), Vol. I, 19, 21, speech in the First Provincial Congress of New Jersey.



John Jay



Unto Him who is the author and giver of all good, I render sincere and humble thanks for His manifold and unmerited blessings, and especially for our redemption and salvation by His beloved Son. . . . Blessed be His holy name.

— John Jay, president of Congress, diplomat, author of The Federalist Papers, original chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, governor of New York.

William Jay, *The Life of John Jay* (New York: J & J Harper, 1833), Vol. II, 386, to John Murray, April 15, 1818.

Is Salvation by Faith Alone in Christ Alone?

to you! Human works are not evident anywhere in this profoundly insightful passage on the subject.

N. ROMANS 5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word for *having been justified* is in the perfect tense, which means something that happened in the past and has an ongoing impact in the present or future. Accordingly, the true believer's justification by faith assures him of ongoing *peace with God*, i.e., the individual is no longer at war or enmity with God. Scripture makes no mention of God's intending some kind of ongoing insecurity regarding the eternal destination of the believer. At the point of placing our faith in Christ, i.e., that point in time when he receives Christ and is *justified*, from there on forward exists a continuing assurance of salvation per this passage (and many others!). In contrast, if the economy of salvation were at all dependent on human works, and at some point, those human works were less than sufficient—well, it is quite easy to see why the believer's eternal security would never be assured in his or her mind. Such is not the case in an economy that is totally and completely based on the grace of God.

O. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:21B

God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. Without spending space to fully explain the context of this passage, the message of the gospel is so simple that those who are "worldly wise" reason it to be *foolishness*. That some are too proud to accept the simplicity of the gospel underscores God's true, simple husbandry of salvation—that being

by faith alone: *God is well-pleased...to save those who believe.* Even the worst of sinners in God's economy can still be saved near the end of their lives (as illustrated previously by the thief on the cross) because salvation is all about God's doing it, not man's!

P. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:2

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Paul is candidly bearing his soul in this passage and affirming his reliance on God to communicate accurately His unadulterated gospel through him. Note from Paul's perspective that there is no big formula for achieving salvation; he *determined to know nothing else*. In his preaching and teaching, there is nothing else for him to say but this! There is no long list of things a person must do or check off in order to be saved! Salvation is all about what Christ did on our behalf. It is simple!

Q. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:19

Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. *Reconciling* is the Greek word *katallasso*, which denotes the idea we use when balancing our checkbook: "to change or bring back in line." Per this passage, *God...in Christ was* (and is!) doing this action of *reconciling*. *Trespasses* (*paraptoma*) denotes "a deviation from uprightness and truth, having gone the wrong direction." In other words, *Christ* alone is the One Who brought us back in line from our wrong direction! Again, note the recipe of salvation: God is the One Who brings us in line and Who forgives all our *trespasses*! Such is not achieved by our personal acts of merit!



R. 2 CORINTHIANS 11:3-4

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached...or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. One of Paul's biggest concerns for the church at Corinth was the later arrival (after he had established the church and departed) of false teachers who then preached a false doctrine of salvation. Even more, he states that he is concerned that the congregation would not discern the soteriological erosion, i.e., that they might *bear* in their soul such heresy! This passage reveals the primacy and solemnity of getting the gospel right!

Similarly concerned regarding false teachers of the gospel, Paul said to the Galatian believers in Galatians 1:6-9, *I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!* These passages serve to underscore what constitutes the gospel—that salvation is by faith *alone* in *Christ alone*—and are overwhelmingly important! We must correctly understand the doctrine of salvation in order to be saved!

S. GALATIANS 2:16

“Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” Similar to the other Galatians passages previously listed, this one becomes self-explanatory in light of what we have already studied. It plainly underscores the falsity of a works-based soteriology.

T. GALATIANS 3:11, 13

Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for... Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.... People either trust in works righteousness, or they are trusting in Christ's righteousness to save themselves. What this passage is declaring is that you are not trusting in Christ at all if in any part you are trusting in yourself. If that is the case, then Christ's death on the cross was insufficient. Galatians 2:21 puts it this way: *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”*

**Justification by the law
versus justification by faith
are mutually exclusive
currencies. There is no mixing
of the two in God's eyes.**

U. PHILIPPIANS 3:9

And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. This passage is a great summary of all that we have been learning. A person

can obtain great pride through the performance of good works, religious activity, rituals, and ceremonies—amassing a self-gained righteousness. Paul contrasts that herein with self-surrendering acceptance of *Christ's* imputed *righteousness*. Whereas the former person may be found in Him or has salvation, the other person, implied by the contrast, does not.

V. COLOSSIANS 1:13-14

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The word *delivered* (*rhuomai*) in the Greek means “to draw to oneself from bondage; to rescue.” In salvation, God draws us out of bondage to Himself. *He delivers, He rescues, and He transfers*—not us.

W. 1 THESSALONIANS 1:10B

That is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. Jesus rescues us from the eternal *wrath to come*, i.e., hell. Like all the other passages we have examined, there is no mention of delivering self.

X. 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13B

God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.... This insight into salvation is similar to Ephesians 1:4, where it says, *Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world....* This foretells who plays what role in salvation. If God foreordained salvation long before (and these passages state that in no unmistakable terms), then you cannot infer that salvation is something you decided to achieve on your own, i.e., self-works based. To infer that a person gains heaven by self-effort is to negate and gut the clarion declaration of these passages.



Charles Carroll



“On the mercy of my Redeemer I rely for salvation and on His merits, not on the works I have done in obedience to His precepts.”

— Charles Carroll, signer of the Declaration of Independence, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, framer of the Bill of Rights, U.S. senator.

Lewis A. Leonard, *Life of Charles Carroll of Carrollton* (New York: Moffit, Yard & Co, 1918), 256–257.

Is Salvation by Faith Alone in Christ Alone?

Y. 1 TIMOTHY 1:15

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.... Evidently, the early Church had reduced important doctrinal truths into simple statements. Paul affirms this traditional Church summary as an accurate saying, which summarizes the meat of the gospel. Perhaps even more important to note in this passage is Scripture’s preeminent authority over Church traditions (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8). Accordingly:

When conflict exists between Scripture and tradition—be it in the personal, familial, or ecclesiastical realm, soteriological or otherwise—Scripture must be the final authority and arbitrator.

The fact that *Christ...saves sinners* must negate and supersede any other traditions to the contrary.

Z. 2 TIMOTHY 1:8B–9

But join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

Again, God’s salvation has nothing to do with present personal merit.

AA. TITUS 2:13–14

Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous

for good deeds. Christ is the One Who gave, Who redeems, Who purifies, Who possesses, and Who makes us *resultingly zealous* to do good deeds. Why do we do *good deeds*? Not to be saved but because of so great a salvation! The *resulting good deeds* mentioned at the end are clearly the by-product—not the means of salvation. Hebrews 2:3 calls this *so great a salvation!*

AB. PHILEMON

Philemon is only one chapter long, and the whole of the book illustrates forgiveness. Onesimus was a slave owned by Philemon (v. 16). In that Onesimus had wronged his master (v. 15), Paul writes to Philemon, asking him to charge anything that Onesimus may have done to Philemon to Paul’s account (v. 18). In so doing, Paul mentions to Philemon that Philemon himself had come to Christ through Paul—and therefore owes Paul his very life (v. 19)! Herein lies a magnificent similitude illustrating the core of our study: Paul chose to use himself as the payment for Onesimus’ trespasses. Paul himself reconciles Onesimus’ account with Philemon. The point is this: Onesimus had nothing to do with it! Paul hoped that, having paid for the sins of Onesimus, Onesimus would stay on in his newfound liberty and minister the gospel with him (v. 13). Onesimus’ resulting good deeds are motivated from a heart of gratitude and thankfulness. One hymn writer best sums up this epistle’s message in this way, “Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe.”

AC. HEBREWS 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. This chapter in the book of Hebrews is the “Faith Hall of Fame,” containing men



and women who pleased God. How? They pleased Him by humble, dependent *faith*, not arrogant self-righteousness. As illustrated by the many people in this chapter, God's basis of operation with His creation is *faith*, not works.

AD. 1 PETER 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith.... This beautiful, pregnant passage contains many of the salvific actions of God as previously investigated in this study. What a beautiful portrayal of the security of the believer! Again, the security of the believer is not dependent upon human works.

AE. 2 PETER 1:3

Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. Note again the sufficiency of Christ relative to our salvation. Salvation is a result of *His divine power*, which accomplishes *everything*.

AF. 1 JOHN 5:11-13

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

These are some of my favorite verses in the entire Bible. They are cut and dried. God wants you to know whether or not you have eternal life with Him. He does not want you to have to guess about your eternal destiny all through life! Notice that this passage says *so that you may know*. Knowing you have *eternal life* is based solely on whether or not you *have the Son*—not human works.

AG. JUDE 3

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. The term *the faith* refers to the composite of salvation truth contained throughout all of the Scripture (cf. Galatians 1:23; Ephesians 4:5, 13; Philippians 1:27; 1 Timothy 4:1) as we have thoroughly examined in this study. The verse gives insight into the fact that true believers must be willing to *contend* (*epagonizomai*), i.e., “confront, attack, and battle” those who would adulterate or dilute this analogous tenet throughout biblical soteriology. That is to more than suggest that the biblical formula for salvation must be adhered to and theological digression into a works-based soteriology is totally unacceptable to God! Scripture does not suggest that God has much wiggle room on the doctrine of salvation, my friend. Additionally, this verse states that the gospel, as given in the Scripture, is complete. It is *once for all delivered to the saints*. Scriptures have no more additions, redefinitions, or differing interpretations coming from some other later, outside extrabiblical source. Delivered or handed down by the apostles and prophets in their respective eras, Scripture is today complete and resolved

on soteriology (as on all other Bible doctrines).

AH. REVELATION 17:8B

“And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder....” The redeemed are known by God from the foundation of the world and are written in His Book of Life. Again, this verse illustrates God's doing versus man's in salvation.

As you can see by our lengthy yet persuasive survey, the Scriptures are analogous on the fact that *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast*. All man must do is respond in faith, which includes repenting of sin and receiving Jesus Christ's work on his or her behalf—thereby receiving God's free gift of salvation (cf. John 1:12; Ephesians 1:13).

To suggest that salvation be otherwise is a very dangerous proposition, one in direct contradiction to the whole counsel of God.

Having only scratched the biblical surface of soteriology, but enough to garner the homogeneity of its teaching, let us now move to examine other passages often used to teach a contrary form of salvation. I will comment on each.

IV. THE SUSPECT

A. JAMES 2:26B

Faith without works is dead. The book of James addresses phony faith as does Matthew 7:21, wherein Jesus states *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord,*



Roger Sherman



“I believe that God ... did send His own Son to become man, die in the room and stead of sinners, and thus to lay a foundation for the offer of pardon and salvation to all mankind, so as all may be saved who are willing to accept the Gospel offer.”

— Roger Sherman, signer of the Declaration of Independence, signer of the Constitution, “Master Builder of the Constitution”, judge, framer of the Bill of Rights, U.S. senator.

Lewis Henry Boutell, *The Life of Roger Sherman* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1896), 271–273.

Is Salvation by Faith Alone in Christ Alone?

Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.” How is anyone to ascertain true faith from phony faith according to the Bible? Matthew 7:20 answers, “*You will know them by their fruits.*” James, in his own way of expressing himself, is making the same point: faith that has no accompanying outward manifestations is fraudulent. Good works always accompany genuine saving faith, says James. In Genesis 22, Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as an expression of his genuine faith. This external manifestation of obedience directly related to his internal salvation as recorded in Genesis 15 (one of the first passages we examined). James’ epistle has been greatly misunderstood throughout church history (including the Reformation period), as if to think what it taught contradicted salvation by faith alone. Rather, the book emphasizes the fact that outward manifestations—or personal meritorious works—always accompany genuine saving faith. Conversely, this passage does not at all mean that faith must have works in addition in order to achieve salvation. That would contradict the remainder of Scripture as we have clearly seen. It would violate the hermeneutical principle of *analogia scriptura*. To look at it another way, if God wanted to warn us about phony faith, how else could He have said it without our possible misunderstanding of His intent?

B. MATTHEW 25:45–46

“*He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these [feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, taking care of the sick and visiting prisoners], you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into everlasting punishment...*” In this lengthy passage, there is seeming textual

evidence for the insecurity of salvation. Supposedly, this text evidences the fact that we must continue to perform good works right up until the end of our life in order to be sure about obtaining everlasting life. The problem with this understanding stems from misinterpreting the earlier part of the passage. If we assume that feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, taking care of the sick, and visiting prisoners are meritorious acts (in verses 35 and 36) which we need to perform for salvation, then the aforesaid conclusion would be fitting. However, if the acts listed are the fruit stemming from God’s gift of salvation, then our interpretation of the concluding verses is entirely different. The latter is the case because verse 34 states, “*Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,*” i.e., the deeds listed are not God’s basis for our entering eternal life; *rather, they are the fruits being manifest relative to God’s bestowal of grace*—those “*blessed of My Father.*” Accordingly, the later non-present fruit only serves to indicate that the person lacked saving faith in the first place. Those with no fruit do not possess saving faith: “*You will know them by their fruits...*” (Matthew 7:16). Moreover, those with no saving faith do not possess justification for their sin. Lastly, those with no justification of sin do not possess eternal security, and “*will go away into everlasting punishment.*” This simple understanding of this seemingly problematic passage, although somewhat hard to explain herein, can certainly be understood as analogous with the remainder of Scripture.

C. 1 JOHN 2:9

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. Attempts to interpret this



passage might indicate that salvation has no assurances. Such an interpretation, however, precludes a working understanding of the Greek language, specifically tenses. Greek language tenses are more definitive and precise than are those of English. Herein the word *hates* is in the present tense, indicative mood, meaning an ongoing, continuous habitual action. Furthermore, like some of the other passages we have examined, the context of this one relates to detecting phonies. Therefore, the meaning of this passage goes something like this: “The one who says he is in the light and yet continually, habitually hates his brother isn’t really saved.” After all, again, “*You will know them by their fruits*” (Matthew 7:20). Again, repeatedly, accompanying true saving faith is always obedience to Christ. Lastly, note that a working knowledge of the Greek present tense is important to understanding all of John’s epistles.

D. 1 CORINTHIANS 9:27

But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. Some have used this passage to indicate that Paul was personally unsure about his eternal security. The context pertains not to that, however, but to Paul’s ministering to others. Specifically, earlier in verses 19 and 22, he talks about his desire to win others to Christ. In so doing, he disciplines his physical body and his flesh to avoid *disqualification* after *preaching* and winning others to Christ. More precisely, he could be talking about sexual sins, which would definitely disqualify someone from a preaching ministry (cf. Psalm 101:6; Proverbs 6:33; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). In summary, contextually his comments do not relate to his eternal security but rather his

continuing in ministry; preaching, not salvation, is the subject of the passage. To interpret the passage as soteriological creates a huge Pauline contradiction in theology—in light of all else Paul taught in this previous survey.

E. PHILIPPIANS 2:12

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. The tense of the Greek verb *work out* has the idea of “to continue *working* to bring something to fulfillment or completion.” Verse 13 goes on to say, *for it is God who is* [continually] *at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* Paul instructs the believers in the church of Philippi to continue to submit their lives to God—as He is working on them—and to do so with a continuing attitude of *fear and trembling*. That means a healthy fear of not ever wanting to offend God, coupled with awesome respect for the One Who saved you. This passage clearly does not mean working to attain salvation; otherwise, Paul would not mention that God was *working in* them in the same space. The context of this passage relates to the doctrine of sanctification, which is post-salvation, not justification itself.

F. MATTHEW 26:27–28

And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.” This passage raises the additional related question: is communion salvific or symbolic? Does a person have to receive communion or continue to receive communion in order to be saved or maintain being saved? Is communion

a human work that must continually be performed in order to obtain salvation? 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 sheds light in answer to this question. Therein Paul interprets communion to be something believers do in remembrance of Him, *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes* (v. 26). Important to observe in and from this passage, neither Paul nor Jesus Christ say anything about communion’s being salvific. Christ’s actual blood, which He is referring to here, shed on the cross for our sins, is the specific agent of forgiveness. Biblically understood, communion symbolizes salvation and the forgiveness of sin thereafter—in a way similar to the way rings signify marriage thereafter. Communion and rings are responsive not causal. Critically, Jesus was not saying that the bread and the wine were literally His body and His blood; rather, they are symbols of remembrance. The cup of wine was not Jesus’ actual blood any more than Jesus was an actual lamb, a door, or a vine, even though He is figuratively called such in John 1:29, 10:7, and 15:5. All are symbols conveying important spiritual truths. Communion is a matter of obedience for the believer post salvation, not a causal ingredient of it.

V. THE SUMMARY

Does Scripture teach that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone? Yes. In addition, it also teaches that true saving faith is always characterized and accompanied by good works.

Good works do not lead to salvation; rather, they are the products of salvation.

The doctrine of salvation is very important because it is the essence of



the gospel—that which people rely on relative to their eternal destiny. Put another way, for the spiritual leader to get this wrong means he or she could be leading others to hell. This is why the Word says, *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment* (James 3:1). Furthermore, Galatians 1:8–9 is worth stating again: if anyone *should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!* The word for *accursed* is *anathema*, meaning “the devotion of someone to destruction in eternal hell” (cf. Romans 9:3; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 16:22). The Bible condemns false teachers to hell.

Later, in the life of the church at Ephesus, Paul would tell Timothy the pastor, *remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines* (1 Timothy 1:3b). Paul was deeply concerned that, *The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths* (2 Timothy 4:3–4). Indeed, that had happened (cf. 1:20) by the time he wrote 1 Timothy. Accordingly, Timothy was to be about *preach[ing] the word* (4:2). He was to *reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction* in this specific regard. Additionally, much of Peter’s second epistle and the second epistle to Corinth relate to the same problem of the false teaching of salvation.

Beloved, in the U.S. capitol, this was a very serious matter in the past and remains so today! Teaching the Word—especially relative to the doctrine of salvation—is a grave and heavy responsibility. That is why I have gone so long in my notes in this study. We must get this right and not tolerate other “ministries” that err at this point! This is as serious as it gets!

My prayer is that this study will have caused you to contemplate and perhaps rethink your soteriology if need be. Determine who and/or what you are relying on for your salvation—God or yourself. Is your doctrine of salvation squared away with all these copious Bible passages? Moreover, if you are relying on your own good deeds to get yourself to heaven, in whole or in part, then you need to repent of your sin of pride and ask Christ into your life today. See you at the Bible study this week.

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