

Irresistible Grace?

By John Hobbs, PhD.

December 2000

The doctrine of Irresistible Grace is the fourth cardinal point in the Calvinistic theology. It is the "I" in the T-U-L-I-P acrostic. Irresistible Grace is also referred to as Special Grace or Efficacious Grace.

How the Calvinists Understand Irresistible Grace

Calvinists deny that Irresistible Grace is God forcing someone to come against his own will. Rather, say the Calvinists, Irresistible Grace makes the individual willing to come. Berkhof defined it thus: "By changing the heart it makes man perfectly willing to accept Jesus Christ unto salvation and to yield obedience to the will of God."

The Canons of Dort state that when God chooses an individual to be saved, He "powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit; ... He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart; ... He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it ... this is regeneration ... which God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe."

John Calvin wrote about "the secret energy of the Spirit" and "the pure prompting of the Spirit." Calvin meant that the Holy Spirit would have to be sent to an individual to call him to salvation and once called he could not refuse. Calvin wrote, "As I have already said, it is certain that the mind of man is not changed for the better except by God's prevenient grace." Prevenient Grace is defined as "Divine grace that is said to

operate on the human will antecedent to its turning to God.” In other words man’s will is totally subservient to the irresistible call from God.

David Steele and Curtis Thomas state:

This special call is not made to all sinners but is issued to the elect only! The Spirit is in no way dependent upon their help or cooperation for success in His work of bringing them to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinists speak of the Spirit’s call and God’s grace in saving sinners as being ‘efficacious’, ‘invincible’, or ‘irresistible’. For the grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ!

Paul Enns states:

In the logic of Calvinism, God, through His Spirit, draws precisely those whom God unconditionally elected from eternity past and Christ died for. Thus the purpose of God is accomplished. He elected certain ones, Christ died for those very ones, and now through the Holy Spirit, God dispenses His irresistible grace to them to make them willing to come. They do not want to resist.

Billy Graham wrote:

Being born again is altogether a work of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing you can do to obtain this new birth ... In other words, there is nothing you can do about it ... The new birth is wholly foreign to our will. – No man can ever be saved unless the Holy Spirit in supernatural, penetrating power comes and works upon your heart. You can’t come to Christ any time you want to, you can only come when the Spirit of God is drawing and pulling and wooing.

James Boyce believes that for man it is “impossible for him to be delivered by his own acts, even if he had the will to perform them.” Boyce believes that God did not choose the “elect” because He foresaw that these individuals would be good and pious people; he believes that it was because of God’s unconditional selective choosing of the elect that the elect or chosen ones are led to believe. Boyce takes the position that salvation is not dependent upon “the choice of the elect” but solely upon God’s choice.

Thomas Nettles denies that an individual can contribute to his own salvation. He believes that man’s faith does not come from man’s willingness to receive the word but “only from God’s sovereign bestowal.” He says, “The Holy Spirit moves in such a way as to create willingness in the form of repentance and faith.” He denies that the New Testament commandments of repentance and belief imply that man has it within his own power to repent and have faith.

W. J. Seaton wrote:

What is meant by irresistible grace? We know that when the gospel call goes out in a church, or in the open air, or through reading God’s Word, not everyone heeds that call. Not everyone becomes convinced of sin and his need of Christ. This explains the fact that there are two calls. There is not only an outward call; there is also an inward call. The outward call may be described as “words of the preacher”, and this call, when it goes forth, may work a score of different ways in a score of different hearts producing a score of different results. One thing it will not do, however; it will not work a work of salvation in a sinner’s soul. For a work of salvation to be wrought the outward call must be accompanied by the inward call of God’s Holy Spirit, for He it is who ‘convinces of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. And when the Holy Spirit calls a man, or a woman, or a young person by His grace, that call is irresistible: it cannot be frustrated; it is the manifestation of God’s irresistible

grace.

Lorraine Boettner defines Irresistible Grace as:

God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it.

Man's Responsibility in the Salvation Process

Calvinism assumes that God has predetermined and foreordained certain ones to be saved, and that they cannot come to salvation until the Holy Spirit in a supernatural way works on the hearts of the elect. When the Holy Spirit calls the elect individual, he cannot resist. He has to respond, but he has to wait until the Holy Spirit calls him in some mysterious way. Also, if one is not one of the "elect," it will be impossible for him to be saved. Therefore, it is all the Holy Spirit's working. Man is a totally passive respondent in the salvation process, according to Calvinism, which denies that an individual can contribute to his own salvation.

In 1976, Robert Hudnut wrote the book *Church Growth Is Not the Point*. Hudnut is Calvinistic to the core. He writes,

We have been saved. It is not our doing. – No you don't even have to repent. Paul didn't. He was on his way to jail when it happened. He didn't do anything. – It is then we are driven to the passive action of repentance. You do not repent your way to God.

Notice that Hudnut says repentance is passive. His theology is

corrupt. Man is told to repent in Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; and Revelation 2:16. In every verse cited, the Greek verb is in the active not the passive voice. Repentance is something man must do (Greek active voice); it is not what is done to him (Greek passive voice). There is not one case in the Bible of a person being passive while being saved. Even Paul was told what he "must do" (Acts 9:6). In Acts 2:38 repentance is tied to the remission of sins. If a man wants to be saved, then there is something he must do. Man does have a choice to make in his own salvation (Acts 2:40; Deut. 30:11-19; Joshua 24:15; Matt. 23:37; John 5:40). He must be involved. Without man's active role in the conversion process, he is lost.

The responsibility for man having an "honest and good heart" (Luke 8: 15), in order for the seed of the Kingdom to produce, lies with the person, not God. Man is told to "take heed how" he hears (Luke 8:18). The command in Luke 8:18 would be meaningless if man did not have a part in his own salvation. Why should one "take heed how" he hears if his salvation is a product of irresistible grace? Why "take heed" if the Holy Spirit is going to operate on the heart without a man's cooperation?

The Bible teaches man has a part to play in the salvation process. Notice these verses:

John 7:17, "If any man willeth to do his will"

John 7:37, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

John 12:26, "If any man serve me, let him follow me."

John 12:47, If any man hear my sayings, and keep them not."

Revelation 22:17, "He that is athirst, let him say, Come."

Revelation 22:17, "He that will, let him take the water of life freely."

The point of all these verses is that an individual must

“will” and “thirst” and “want to” come to the Lord. It is the responsibility of the individual to “will” – it is not God’s responsibility!

God creates “will” in any person with “an honest and good heart” through the preached word of the cross (John 12:32-33; 1 Cor. 1:18, 21; 2:2). The word is to be preached to everyone (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). To hold God responsible for creating the right “will” in a person arbitrarily and unconditionally makes God a “respector of persons.” This is something he is not (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17).

Is Faith Totally a Gift From God?

John Calvin wrote:

Faith is a singular gift of God, both in that the mind of man is purged so as to be able to taste the truth of God and in that his heart is established therein. – This is why Paul in another place commends faith to the elect (Titus 1:1) that no one may think that he acquires faith by his own effort but that his glory rests with God, freely to illumine whom he previously had chosen. – Faith – the illumination of God – Faith which he (i.e. God) put into our hearts – Our faith which arises not from the acumen of the human intellect but from the illumination of the Spirit alone – Faith flows from regeneration.

Thomas Nettles wrote:

Faith is a gift of God and is bestowed gratuitously by him. – Neither justification nor faith comes from man’s willingness to receive but only from God’s sovereign bestowal. – Belief is still the result of the effectual call and regenerating power of God.

Millard Erickson wrote: "Faith is God's gift," which refutes this Calvinistic mistake.

He wrote:

Is this Calvinistic view that faith is totally the gift of God correct? No! Does an individual have to wait for the Holy Spirit to come in some secret way to infuse faith? No! There are several reasons:

For God to give certain people faith arbitrarily makes God a respecter of persons. The Bible is emphatic that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:11, 10:12; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). Salvation depends upon man exercising his freedom of will. If salvation depends totally upon the Holy Spirit and a man is lost, that man can blame God. But, that will not happen because the Lord has done his part; man must do his.

Faith comes through the hearing of the word of God not through some secret mysterious sending by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:17; Luke 8:11-12; John 6:44-45; 20:30-31; Acts 4:4; 8:12; 15:7; 18:8; 20:32; Eph. 1:13). None of these verses indicate faith coming through a supernatural calling. Faith comes as we hear and study the evidence and then we ourselves decide to believe.

Faith is our part in the salvation process (1 John 5:4; Rev. 2:10). We have a responsibility to save ourselves (Acts 2:40) and to build our faith (Jude 20; Acts 20:32). This is something we must do. Passages like Hebrews 11:6 are meaningless if the Holy Spirit is going to miraculously infuse faith. Jesus said, "Ye must be born anew" (John 3:7). The word "must" is in the active voice indicating we have a part to play in our salvation. We are not totally passive in the salvation process. Our active obedient faith is necessary for us to be saved (Heb. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:8; John 3:36; Rom. 6:17-18; James 2:24-26).

God purifies the heart by faith (Acts 15:9). Calvinists have the heart purified before faith. Alexander Campbell said, "Why do we preach the gospel to convert men, if, before they believe the gospel, and without the gospel, men are renewed and regenerated by the direct and immediate influence of God's Spirit?" Good question!

Calvinists teach that "spiritual darkness" refers to man's depraved condition and that God has to perform supernatural secret surgery by the Holy Spirit in order to bring men into "spiritual light." But, in Acts 26:16-18, Paul was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles to "open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." A careful study of the book of Acts reveals that the early Christians depended upon the word of God to change the hearts of sinners and produce faith. Nowhere in the book of Acts do we find someone being converted by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

One is never so "spiritually dead" that he cannot hear and understand and believe the word of God in order to have faith (Eph. 5:14; John 5:25; 12:42-43). The rulers of the Jews "believed on" Jesus but would not confess him. Did they believe? Yes! Their problem was a "want to" problem not that they were so spiritually dead they could not understand. Calvinists misunderstand 1 Corinthians 2:14. The "natural man" of 1 Cor. 2:14 is the man who does not care about spiritual things – not the man who cannot understand them. Calvinists say the unsaved man cannot understand spiritual truth. Wrong! The rulers of the Jews, who were unsaved, in John 12:42-43 understood the truth exactly. They just "did not want to" obey the Lord. Wayne Grudem, and Ralph Gore, and Millard Erickson, who are Calvinists, do not even discuss John 12:42-43.

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, a professor at Trinity Theological Seminary in Newburgh, Indiana – a Calvinistic school – believes that Ephesians 2:8 teaches that faith is a

direct gift from God and that man cannot do anything himself to get faith. The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." After quoting this verse Montgomery said,

Don't get the idea that you did it. You didn't do it. Faith is the gift of God. The word 'that' in Ephesians 2:8 refers to 'faith' because 'faith' is the closest antecedent to the word 'that.' Once a person is saved, he cannot properly accredit that to anything but the Holy Spirit.

Faith is, in one sense, a gift of God because God has given us the Word which produces faith. Without the Word, we could not have faith. But, the entire Bible and especially Ephesians 2:8 do not teach that faith is a direct gift of God in which we have no part. The word "that" in Ephesians 2:8 refers to the salvation process. The salvation process is "the gift of God." We are saved "by grace through faith" which is the salvation process. But, this does not mean we have earned our salvation. We cannot boast of our salvation as if we have worked for it and earned it (Eph. 2:9). Jesus said even after we have done all that we are commanded to do we are to say, "We are unprofitable servants we have done that which is our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). James said, "Faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26).

Verses Misused by Calvinists to Support Irresistible Grace

John 6:37: "All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

WJ. Seaton said: "Note that it is those whom the Father has given to Christ -the elect- that shall come to Him; and when

they come to Him they will not be cast out."

Response: (1) All those with a submissive spirit will come to Christ. These are the ones whom the Father gives to Jesus and not one of these will he refuse (cf. John 10:26-29 where the verbs "hear" and "follow" are continuous action). One must come with a willing heart John 5:40; 7:17; Matt. 13:9; Rev. 22:17). (2) There is nothing here or in God's word that teaches that God arbitrarily chooses those who come to Christ. Jesus uses truth and love to persuade men to accept him John 12:32-33, 48; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). Calvinists are reading into the text an arbitrary decree that is not there! (3) The gospel is for all (Mark 16:15-16), but not all men will accept it (2 Thess. 1:7-10). Those who refuse to accept Christ do so because of their own willful rejection (Matt. 13:14-15; 23:37)- not because of some arbitrary decree. Paul Butler says, "Man's rejection by God is caused by man's rejection of God." (4) Jesus said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15). Jesus did not say, "The Holy Spirit will supernaturally open your hearts so you can believe." In Matthew 11:15 Jesus was teaching that man has a responsibility to have an "honest and good heart." That is not the work of the Holy Spirit. If a man does not have an "honest and good heart," he cannot and will not come to Jesus. (5) In context John 6:40 explains John 6:37 and 39. It explains who the Father has given unto Jesus: Those who "beholdeth" and "believeth" on the Son! Both of these verbs are present tense verbs indicating continuous action. Those who continue to behold and believe on the Son are the ones whom the Father has given unto Jesus. It is our own individual free-will responsibility to continue to believe. We are not forced or coerced against our will.

John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day."

John Calvin said: "But nothing is accomplished by preaching him if the Spirit, as our inner teacher, does not show our

minds the way. Only those men, therefore, who have heard and have been taught by the Father come to him. What kind of learning and hearing is this? Surely, where the Spirit by a wonderful and singular power forms our ears to hear and our minds to understand.”

W.J. Seaton said: “Here our Lord is simply saying that it is impossible for men to come to Him of themselves; the Father must draw them.”

Response: (1) Calvin assumes the drawing is a miraculous operation. We base truth on clear biblical teaching – not assumptions. (2) The next verse explains how God does the drawing and it is not miraculous. It is written that one must be taught (Jer. 31:31-34; Isa. 54:13). One must hear and one must learn! This is not miraculous! God draws men through teaching. “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The book of Acts is proof positive that Christianity is a taught religion – not a caught religion in the sense that the Holy Spirit must convert a man separate and apart from the word of God. The means and the method the Father uses to draw men is the preached word (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 4:4; 8:4, 12; 11:26; 15:7; 18:8; 20:20; 1 Cor. 1:18-21; 2:1-4; Col. 2:7; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 2:2; etc.). (3) Why did our Lord invite all men to come to him if he knew that it was impossible for some of them to come (Matt. 11:28)? That does not make sense. (4) Guy N. Woods said: “Some are not drawn, because they do not will to do so; it has been well said. that a magnet draws iron, but not all objects are drawn by magnets, because all are not iron! Similarly, one must be of the right disposition and have the proper response to the drawing power of the Father which he exercises through the gospel.” (5) John 12:32-33 also teaches we are drawn to the Lord through Christ’s death on the cross. Some appreciate his death, and sadly, some do not.

Acts 16:14: “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God,

heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul.”

John Calvin said:

Indeed, it does not so stand in man's own impulse, and consequently even the pious and those who fear God still have need of the especial prompting of the Spirit. Lydia, the seller of purple, feared God, yet her heart had to be opened to receive Paul's teaching (Acts 16:14) and to profit by it. This was said not of one woman only but to teach us that the advancement of every man in godliness is the secret work of the Spirit.

Charles Hodge said:

The truth is compared to light, which is absolutely necessary to vision; but if the eye be closed or blind it must be opened or restored before the light can produce its proper impression.” Hodge tries to use the case of Lydia as proof of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

W. 1. Seaton said:

One outstanding illustration of this teaching of irresistible grace, or effectual calling, is certainly the incident that we read in Acts 16. The apostle Paul preaches the gospel to a group of women by the riverside at Philippi; and as he does so, ‘a certain woman named Lydia heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things that were spoken of Paul.’ Paul, the preacher, spoke to Lydia's ear – the outward call; but the Lord spoke to Lydia's heart – the inward call of irresistible grace.

Response: (1) Calvin's admission that Lydia “feared” God before God “opened” her heart destroys his teaching of Total

Depravity. (2) It is a complete assumption that God opened her heart by a direct secret operation of the Holy Spirit. The text does not tell us what Calvin believes. Calvin gives us a classic case of eisegesis – i.e. reading into the text what is not there. (3) The word “heart” is used figuratively. Consider: John 12:40; Matthew 9:4; 13:15; Mark 2:6; and Romans 10:10. The word “opened” is evidently used figuratively – i.e. to expand or broaden the mind. Luke 24:45 states, “Then opened he their mind.” Jesus “opened” the mind of the apostles by explaining the Scriptures to them not by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. The word “opened” was simply a way of saying that the person came to an understanding of, and a belief in, the message under consideration. It is analogous to Paul’s statement in Ephesians 1:18, “having the eyes of your heart enlightened.” (4) Acts 16:14 indicates that the Lord opened her heart through the things which were spoken by Paul. The Spirit’s work in conversion is not something done directly upon the heart apart from the preached Word. (5) J.W. McGarvey said, “The assumption, therefore, that her heart was opened by an abstract influence of the Spirit, is entirely gratuitous and illogical, while the real cause is patent upon the face of the narrative in the preaching done by Paul.” (6) Dr. Richard Oster said, “It is significant that this opening of the heart came only after she had heard what was said by Paul. Perhaps the method of opening her heart was the preached word (cf. Luke 24:45).” (7) The word “heard” is an imperfect tense verb which means continuous action in the past. Lydia kept on hearing Paul. The hearing occurred before the opening of the heart. Wayne Jackson states, “The implication here is the exact opposite of that demanded by Calvinism. That doctrine alleges that one cannot give honest attention to the Word of God until the Lord first opens the heart, but this passage actually demonstrates otherwise. She kept on listening and thereby her heart (understanding) was opened by God!” (8) The words “give heed” implies that Lydia had a choice in her obedience. Study: Acts 8:6-12; 20:28; Luke 8:18 and Hebrews 2:1-2. (9) There are many passages which demonstrate that God,

as a general rule, works through means and not directly (2 Kings 5:1-14; Matt. 6:11; 2 Cor. 9:10).

Romans 10:16-17: "But they did not all hearken to the glad tidings. For Isaiah with, Lord, who hath believed our report? So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God." John Calvin said, "To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed. – By this, he means that only when God shines in us by the light of His Spirit is there any profit from the word. Thus the inward calling, which alone is effectual and peculiar to the elect is distinguished from the outward voice of men."

Calvin believed that the Word of God could only produce faith in a heart of one already illumined by the Spirit of God. In commenting on Romans 10:17, Calvin admits that when Paul makes "hearing the beginning of faith he is describing only the ordinary arrangement and dispensation of the Lord which he commonly uses in calling his people – not, indeed, prescribing for him an unvarying rule so that he may use no other way."

Response: (1) Calvin assumes his doctrine of total depravity is true. He insists they did not believe because they could not believe. The text does not say what Calvin believed. (2) If one must be regenerated before he can hear, then he is regenerated before he has faith. This contradicts many Bible passages (John 8:24; Acts 11:14; 16:14; Rom. 1:17; 5:1; Gal. 3:11). (3) Personal responsibility is definitely set forth in this verse. If anyone does not believe, it is because he does not "hearken" to the message preached – not because of inherited total depravity. Notice the parallel between "hearken" and "believed" with "glad tidings" – i.e. the gospel and "report." To have a saving faith is to hearken – i.e. hear and obey. (4) Every case of conversion in the Bible involved a teaching situation. Christianity is a taught religion (John 6:45; Acts 4:4; 8:4; 11:26; 18:8; 20:20; Col. 2:7; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 2:2). There is no example in the Bible where the Holy Spirit supernaturally infused faith into an individual. A saving faith comes when an honest and good heart is taught

truth found in the word of God and then that truth is accepted and appreciated and appropriated.

Conclusion

There is not one passage in the entire Bible which directly or indirectly teaches Calvinism's doctrine of Irresistible Grace. In fact, it contradicts God's word. Calvinism would make God a "respector of persons." But, the Bible says He is not! It is God's will for all men to be saved; therefore, salvation is conditioned only on man's will. God is always willing for all men to be saved. Calvinism is false doctrine. Let us follow the truth in God's word and reject the false doctrine of Calvinism!

4642 Royal Crest Dr.
Abilene, TX 79606

Seek and Ye Shall Find

By Burl Curtis

Vol. 115, No. 11

The beginner might think this is an unrestricted promise but a search of the scriptures will show seeking and finding are regulated. Jesus qualifies asking and receiving by showing an earthly father would not give his son a stone for bread nor a serpent for a fish. He concludes, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him" (Matt. 7:11)? Asking, seeking and knocking will *not* get you everything you want anytime you want it because God only gives "good and perfect gifts" (James 1:17). Often

people ask for things not good for them and do not come close to knowing what is perfect for them.

Those who think this is an unqualified promise need to follow the example of David Lipscomb who said, "We do not have enough on a question until we study everything that God has said on that subject." He impressed upon his students the great importance of not being satisfied with the investigation of any Bible subject until every related scripture had been examined (*I'll Stand on the Rock: a Biography of H. Leo Boles*, Lipscomb and Choate, 1965).

1. We must seek in the proper order. Jesus said, "But seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things (food and clothing – Matt. 6:31-32) shall be added unto you" (v. 33). Any person or group who does this will use God's blessings to provide the basic necessities for life upon this earth.

2. We must seek in the right manner. God rewards those who "diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Diligence requires making every effort. The man who found the treasure in the field went with joy and sold all he had and bought that field (Matt. 13:44). Many do not find the great treasures of life because they seek half-heartedly (Col. 3:23-24).

3. There is a time to seek. Isaiah warned, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (55:6). Jesus taught a person can wait too late to seek. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are" (Luke 13:22-30; John 7:33-36; 8:21-24). If these words do not strike terror in your soul now, they will when it is too late.

4. We can seek the wrong things. Certain scribes and Pharisees sought after a sign but most of them rejected the greatest sign of all, the resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 12:38-40). Whoever seeks to save his life shall lose it (Luke 17:33). We may seek honor from men and “not the honor that cometh from God only” (John 5:39-47). Paul told the Corinthians “the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after [worldly] wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:22-23).

5. We may seek the Lord at the wrong place, like the women at the tomb who were asked by the two angels, “Why seek ye the living among the dead” (Luke 24:5). We may seek the truth from false teachers who teach the doctrines of men.

6. Men may seek the Lord for the wrong purposes. People came to Capernaum seeking Jesus but he confronted them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:24-29). James wrote, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

7. Sometimes we have to seek and wait. Jesus told the disciples they could not go where he was going at that moment but they would follow him afterward (John 13:33-36). Those who go to heaven must wait for the “revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor immortality , eternal life” (Rom. 2:5-11).

Ask, seek and knock are not unconditional promises. If we seek according to the will of God we will find; we will seek to excel in edifying (1 Cor. 14:12), to be unselfish (1 Cor. 13:5), things that are above (Col. 3:1) and peace (1 Pet. 3:11). John understood these promises when he wrote, “If we ask any thing *according to his will*, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14-15).

Limited Atonement?

By Dr. John Hobbs

The third cardinal doctrine in Calvinistic Theology is the doctrine of "Limited Atonement." It is the "L" in the T-U-L-I-P acrostic. Most Calvinists prefer the term "Particular Atonement" or "Definite Atonement."

What Calvinists Believe About Limited Atonement

The Canons of Dort, article 8, states, 'It was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and only those, who were from eternity chosen to salvation.'

Henry Fish, a Baptist wrote in 1850, 'Did the atonement, in its saving design, embrace more than the elect? The elect only; for whatever he designed he will accomplish, and he saves only his people from their sins.'

David Steele and Curtis Thomas wrote, 'But He came into the world to represent and save only those given Him by the Father. Thus Christ's work was limited in that it was designed to save some and not others.'

WJ. Seaton said, 'Christ died to save a particular number of sinners.'

Lorraine Boettner said, 'The value of the atonement depends upon, and is measured by, the dignity of the person making it; and since Christ suffered as a Divine-human person the

value of His suffering was infinite ... The atonement, therefore, was infinitely meritorious and might have saved every member of the human race had that been God's plan.'

Ralph Gore wrote, "Christ died for the elect. The extent of the atonement is identical with the intent of divine election."

Paul Enns wrote, 'If God is sovereign (Eph. 1:11) then His plan cannot be frustrated, but if Christ died for all people and all people are not saved then God's plan is frustrated.'

R. B. Kuiper said, 'God purposed by the atonement to save only the elect and that consequently all the elect, and they alone, will be saved.'

The question may be put this way: When Christ died on the cross, did he pay for the sins of the entire human race or only for the sins of those who he knew would ultimately be saved? Calvinists would answer the latter group.

Wayne Grudem wrote: The term that is usually preferred is particular redemption, since this view holds that Christ died for particular people (specifically, those who would be saved and whom he came to redeem), that he foreknew each one of them individually (cf. Eph. 1:3-5) and had them individually in mind in his atoning work.

The Foundational Basis for Limited Atonement

The doctrine of Limited Atonement is based on the concept of double jeopardy (trying a person twice for the same crime). The argument goes like this: If Jesus died for the sins of all

men, then the sins of all men are paid for and one has already been judged for those sins. On the Day of Judgment, if God would bring a man into judgment and commit him to hell even though Jesus had already paid for his sins, God would be putting that person in double jeopardy. God would be unjust – something he is not (Deut. 32:4).

The argument is: Since we do not permit double jeopardy in our own legal system, surely we would not expect God to do something we would not do.

Calvinists argue therefore – Jesus actually died only for the sins of the elect, the chosen, the saved.

However, just because there is an analogy from a human viewpoint, this does not prove that it coincides with the truth of God's word.

Isaiah 55:8-9 states, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Proverbs 14:12 states, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." We are warned: "Lean not upon thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

We do not formulate doctrine by analogies or examples. They may illustrate doctrine, but they do not prove doctrine. We must determine truth from the Word of God and not human reasoning. There are some great truths of scripture which are beyond our comprehension and we accept because the Bible teaches them (such as, the Trinity, God's love, nature of sin, and such like), and therefore are not proved by reason, but are known by revelation.

Scriptures Used by Calvinists to

Support Limited Atonement

Matthew 1:21 states, "For it is he that shall save his people from their sins."

Jesus "loved the church and gave himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25).

Romans 4:25 reads, "Who was delivered up for our trespasses."

Romans 5:8 says, "But God commendeth his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:10 reveals, "We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son."

Romans 8:32 declares, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all."

Acts 20:28 states, "To feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood."

In John 10:15 Jesus said, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "Him who knew no sin he made to be [a] sin [offering] on our behalf."

Galatians 1:4 says, "Who gave himself for our sins."

Ephesians 1:7 says, "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."

Titus 2:14 states, "Who gave himself for us."

Calvinists use the above Scriptures as proof texts that Christ died "only" for the elect.

Christ died for his people. That is the main point of these verses! However the Bible does not teach Limited Atonement – that Christ died "only" for the elect, "only" for a limited

class.

Calvinists “twist” and “pervert” other plain Scriptures that clearly teach that Christ died for all men. They do so unto their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:15-17). When we come to the Bible, we must take all of it to arrive at total-saving truth. Psalms 119:160 states, “The sum of all thy word is truth.” Matthew 4:4 says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” It takes all of Scripture for the man of God to be complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We must preach “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Christ died for all men. Christians appreciate the fact that Christ died for them. The verses used by Calvinists emphasize that point. Unbelievers do not appreciate that fact and therefore do nothing about it.

A True Story Concerning Hebrews 2:9

In 1980, I took second year New Testament Greek through Wheaton College at the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Dallas, Texas. My professor was Dr. John Werner, an outstanding world-recognized Greek scholar. But, he was a Calvinist through and through. One day we were reading the book of Hebrews in class. When it came my time to read, I was to translate Hebrews 2:9. I translated the verse, “But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death *only for the elect*.”

My professor and the class laughed. After the laughter subsided, I added, “Excuse me – that should be – for *every* man.”

Brethren, if the grammar makes sense, anything else is nonsense. To deny that Jesus tasted of death “for every man”

is to deny the plain and clear teaching of Scripture! Dr. Werner agreed that the verse should be translated “for every man.” But, he denied that is what it meant. He believed that it meant “every redeemed man” even though that is not what the text says!

We should not base biblical doctrine on “feeling” or “thinking.” Biblical doctrine is based on God’s Word!

If the Holy Spirit wanted to say that Christ died only for the elect, he could have easily done so. But, he did not do so. There is no “specific” passage in the entire Bible that teaches Limited Atonement.

Wayne Grudem, a Calvinist, says, “Hebrews 2:9 is best understood to refer to every one of Christ’s people, every one who is redeemed.”

Grudem is reading the Bible with his rose colored glasses on and sees what he wants to see instead of what is really there! The text does not say that Christ tasted of death for every “redeemed” man. Grudem is reading into the text something that is not there. This is something that God’s Word explicitly forbids (Rev. 22:18-19; 1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:8-9; 3:15; 2 John 9-11; Matt. 4:4; Prov. 30:5-6; Deut. 4:2; 12:32).

The words *every man* in Hebrews 2:9 are translated from the Greek word *pantos* (in form it is a genitive masculine or neuter singular word from the adjective *pas*, *pasa*, *pan* meaning “all” or “every”).

Bruce says:

So far as the form goes, pantos might be masculine (“everyone”) or neuter (“everything”); but since our author’s concern is with Christ’s work for humanity, and not with cosmic implications of His work, it is more probable to be taken as masculine.

Alford says, "The singular brings out, far more strongly than the plural would, the applicability of Christ's death to each individual man." Jesus died for each individual person (which equals all mankind). The singular *pantos* emphasizes his care and love and concern for every human being!

This fact is a strong factor for each individual person to give his life back to him and live a holy God-fearing life (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

This same Greek word, *pantos*, is found in Matthew 13:19 and is translated "when any one." It is obvious in Matthew 13:19 that the Greek word refers only to lost human beings.

It is interesting that the Greek New Testament uses the word *pantos* at least once specifically to refer "only" to condemned human beings. Calvinists say that the word *pantos* in Hebrews 2:9 refers "only" to saved "redeemed" people. If the word *pantos* in Matthew 13:19 refers only to lost people who will spend eternity in hell, does that mean that in Hebrews 2:9 that the same group is being considered? No!

Can the word *pantos* refer to all mankind including those who appreciate Christ's death for them? Of course! Christ "tasted of death for every man." It is important to understand that the meaning of *pantos* will have to be determined by the context. Therefore, we can conclude that in Hebrews 2:9, the Greek word *pantos* refers to all humans period – not just the saved, not just God's special people. Jesus died for all humans – those who are lost and those who are going to heaven. Calvinists deny the plain teaching of God's Word and add to it when they say Jesus tasted of death for every "redeemed" man.

An Examination of God's Word and Limited Atonement

The Bible is very clear that Jesus died for the sins of "all

men" and not just for "the elect."

Consider these passages as to who Jesus died for:

1. John 1:29: "the one that taketh away the sin of the world" – i.e. all mankind
2. John 3:16: "the world" – i.e. all mankind
3. John 4:42: "This is indeed the Saviour of the world" – i.e. all mankind
4. John 12:47: "I came ... to save the world" – i.e. all mankind
5. Romans 5:6: "Christ died for the ungodly"
6. Romans 5:8: "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"
7. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: "he died for all"
8. 2 Corinthians 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" – i.e. all mankind. Those who believe in Limited Atonement say this refers to "the world of the elect." Again, they are adding to the Word of God.
9. 1 Timothy 1:15: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"
10. Timothy 2:6: "Who gave himself a ransom for all"
11. 1 Timothy 4:10: "Who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe"
12. Titus 2:11: "bringing salvation to all men"
13. Hebrews 2:9: "He should taste of death for every man."
14. 2 Peter 2:1: "Denying the Master that bought them" – Christ provided redemption for the false prophets but they refused to accept it.
15. 1 John 2:2: "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." – i.e. all mankind
16. 1 John 4:14 "The Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" – i.e. all mankind

A Study of 1 John 2:2

One passage that must be the focus of our attention is 1 John 2:2. Here John wrote, "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

Vine defines "propitiation" as "a means whereby sin is covered and remitted." The text is very clear that sin covering has been provided "for our sins" – that is, Christians' and "for the whole world," or all humanity. If there was ever a verse in the Bible that taught the possibility of unlimited salvation – this is it!

Brown says that the word "world" is the "sphere of human beings and of human experience." The apostle John uses the word "world" several times to refer to all humanity (John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; 12:46-47; 1 John 4:14).

It is sad that some people "twist" the scriptures from their true meaning (2 Pet. 3:15-17). The same basis for forgiving one man's sins is also the same basis for forgiving the sins of all men – the death of Christ.

It is not implied or taught that sins are forgiven unconditionally. The Bible does not teach the doctrine of Universalism, i.e. all men will be saved. The Bible does teach that only those who appropriate the blood of Christ over their sins will be saved (Rom. 6:3-4, 17-18; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rev. 2:10; 7:14).

Wayne Grudem, a Calvinist, writes, "The preposition 'for' [in 1 John 2:2] is ambiguous with respect to the specific sense in which Christ is the propitiation "for" the sins of the world.

The Greek word translated "for" in this verse is peri, and means 'concerning' or 'with respect to.' It does not define the way in which Christ is the sacrifice with respect to the

sins of the world.

It is consistent with the language of the verse to say that John is simply saying that Christ is the sacrifice available to pay for the sins of anyone and everyone in the world."

There are several problems with Grudem's twisting of Scripture:

(1) Grudem does not deal with the word *world* in his defense of Calvinism. It is obvious that John uses the word "world" in the verse and in the other verses cited to refer to all humanity. Jesus died for all mankind.

(2) It is true that the word *for* in the phrase *for the whole world* is the Greek word *peri*. I agree that it means "concerning" or "with respect to."

Robertson says that *pen* has a sense similar to *hyper* in the verse. The word *hyper* means "in behalf of." It must be pointed out that the word *for* in the phrases *for our sins* and *not for ours only* in 1 John 2:2 is translated from the Greek word *peri*.

The Holy Spirit inspired John to use the Greek word *peri* three times in 1 John 2:2. This word is sufficient to define the way Christ is the sacrifice "for our sins" but not "for the sins of the whole world."

Grudem says that the preposition *peri* "is ambiguous." He is straining the gnat and swallowing the camel in order to avoid accepting the clear truth. Grudem would say that its third use in the verse is ambiguous but not its first and second uses.

The emphasis in the verse is on Christ's "propitiation" – not the preposition "for."

John says Christ's propitiation is "for our sins" and "not for ours only" but also "for the sins of the whole world."

A Study of 1 Timothy 4:10

Paul wrote, "For to this end we labor and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of them that believe."

This verse is important to the discussion. Here the apostle clearly states the salvation of all men. He does not teach Universalism. But, he does teach that salvation has been provided for all men, i.e. all humanity. However, that salvation is appropriated and appreciated by those who believe. All men are potentially saved by Christ's death, but only those who appropriate the blood of Christ over their sins will be saved.

Grudem says:

He [Jesus] is referring to God the Father, not to Christ, and probably uses the word 'Savior' in the sense of 'one who preserves people's lives and rescues them from danger' rather than the sense of 'one who forgives their sins,' for surely Paul does not mean that every single person will be saved.

Grudem misses it again.

(1) No, Paul is not teaching that every single person will be saved. No New Testament writer ever taught that.

(2) There is no problem with taking the word *Savior* as referring to God the Father. He is the Savior of all men in that He sent Jesus to die for all men (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). The Father and the Son are one in purpose, aim, plan, and design (John 10:30).

(3) For Grudem to say that the word *Savior* does not refer to "sins" shows his theological bias. In Matthew 1:21, the child is to be called Jesus. Why? Because he will save his people from their "sins." The word "Jesus" means "Savior."

Grudem does not want 1 Timothy 4:10 to refer to “sins,” so he denies it.

(4) God desires “all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Jesus “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6). Salvation for “all men” has been provided (1 Tim. 4:10). However, this salvation is “specially” for those who “believe.” This word does not imply that all will be saved. The Greek word *malista* translated “specially” is also translated “particularly” or “especially” in 1 Timothy 5:17 and “above all” or “especially” in 2 Timothy 4:13. Paul is saying that God is potentially the Savior of all men. For the individuals who “will” to come to the Lord, these individuals “will in no wise be cast out” (John 5:40; 6:37).

J.W. Roberts wrote, “He is the savior (potentially) of all men, but especially (or actually) of believers.”

Dr. J. C. Davis states, “God is the potential Savior of all men (John 3:16; Rom. 10:13; 2 Pet. 3:9). God is the actual Savior of believers” (Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 2:10).

J. N. D. Kelly wrote, “Paul is no doubt giving expression to his conviction that the certainty of salvation belongs in an especial degree to those who have accepted Christ.” True!

1 Timothy 4:10 is like Galatians 6:10. Christians are to “work that which is good toward all men and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith.” We have an obligation to do “good toward all men” (even the ones who have not named the name of Christ). But, we have a special obligation to help those who are Christians. Christ died for all men but especially for those who believe.

An Invitation Is Given to All Men

In Matthew 11:25, Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The church,

the bride as it is called, and the Holy Spirit perpetuate that invitation as shown by John in Revelation 22:17:

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

The invitation is given to all men. Why offer salvation to all if that is not possible? The text says “whosoever” will.

God Desires All Men to Be Saved

In (2 Peter 3:9) we read:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

God wants “all” to come to repentance! Boettner, a Calvinist, denies that it is God’s plan for all to be saved. Seaton, a Calvinist, asks, “The over-riding question must always be the Divine intention; did God intend to save all men, or did He not?”

The fact that God desires that “all” should come to repentance implies that God has provided provisions for “all.” Christ died for all men. This verse teaches that if a man is lost, it is against God’s will because he wants “all” to come to repentance and be saved.

In 1 Timothy 2:4, Paul wrote, “Who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.” Here again God’s Word is clear. God desires that all men be saved.

In (Ezekiel 33:11) we read:

As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way

and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

God desires that the wicked turn from his evil ways and live. God does not want or wish that any person be lost.

Paul Enns, a Calvinist, wrote, "If God is sovereign then His plan cannot be frustrated, but if Christ died for all people and all people are not saved, then God's plan is frustrated."

God is sovereign, but his plan involves the free will of man. His plan is that those who by their free will elect to believe and become obedient will be saved.

God is "frustrated" or "grieved" when men do not respond to his saving grace (Gen. 6:5-6; Mark 3:5; Luke 19:41; Eph. 4:30).

God's desire and will is frustrated when men are lost. God wants "all" to come to repentance and "all men" to be saved. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). "God is not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9).

But, some will perish – not because Jesus did not die for them. He died for each individual person to show his intense love. If an individual is lost, it is because he has rejected God's intense love. God does not desire it that way. But, he respects the right of a person to make his own decision.

Pardon for Sins Can Be Rejected

It is possible for pardon and salvation to be offered and rejected. In 1829 two men, Wilson and Porter, were apprehended in the state of Pennsylvania for robbing the United States mail. They were indicted, convicted, and sentenced to death by hanging. Three weeks before the scheduled execution, President Andrew Jackson pardoned one of the men, George Wilson. This was followed by a strange decision. George Wilson refused the

pardon! He was hung because he rejected the pardon.

Today, God has provided eternal salvation and pardon for all men. He has accomplished this by sending his one-of-a-kind Son to die for the sins of each and every individual person. However, this salvation can be refused.

If one chooses not to appropriate the blood of Christ over his sins initially and continually, he is refusing and rejecting the salvation which has been provided for him by God Almighty. While we can recognize the foolishness of such a decision, we must be aware of the fact that the majority of mankind will refuse their pardon (Matt. 7:13-14; Luke 13:23-24). How sad!

Why Did God Create Man?

A lady asked me, "Why did God create man if he knew so many would be lost?"

This is a thought-provoking question. I answer this with two thoughts:

(1) Whatever God does is right and just. We may not understand what he does but that is because we are human and finite while he is divine and infinite (Isa. 55:8-9). Deuteronomy 32:4 states, "For all his ways are justice: A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he." God himself asked Job, "Wilt thou even annul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be justified?" Job attacked and condemned the present righteousness of God. Job sinned by doing this. Job later repented Job 40:35; 42:1-6).

(2) I think the answer to this tough question is that God respects our free moral agency. If a man is lost, it will be his fault – not God's! God has done everything possible for the salvation of each person. God will not overtake one's will and force him to obey. Life is what we make it! We can avail ourselves of God's love or we can spurn it and reject it. The

choice is ours (Deut. 30:11-15; Joshua 24:15; Acts 2:37, 40).

Seaton, a Calvinist, said, "If it was God's intention to save the entire world, then the atonement of Christ has been a great failure, for vast numbers of mankind have not been saved."

Seaton misses it. Christ's death was not a failure. The failure is man's free moral will. Man by his own free will chooses not to obey. Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9; cf. John 3:36; Rom. 6:17-18; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17).

On the Day of Judgment if a person is cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity, it will be his own failure – not God's! The failure lies with man not with God.

Calvinists say they focus on God's sovereignty while we focus on man's free will. I say it is not an either/or situation; it is a both/and situation. Both of these concepts are respected in the scriptures. We must accept both.

Conclusion

To deny the Bible teaching that Christ died for all is to make God a respecter of persons – unjust and unmerciful. The doctrine of limited atonement is false. All men are potentially saved. If a person refuses pardon, death is not the fault of the one who offered mercy, but of the one who refused to accept it.

(Editor's Note: The word atonement means to cover or conceal. It is an Old Testament word and is not found in the New Testament. The sins of people before the cross could be atoned, but after the cross the sins of the obedient believer were forgiven. There is a dramatic difference. Under Moses there was a remembrance made of atoned sins year by year [Heb. 10:3 – the blood of bulls and goats could not take away

sins]. The blood of animals could cause God to overlook sins while remembering them year by year, but could not remove the sins. This was atonement. The blood of the Lamb of God is able not to merely cover or bypass sins, but to remove every transgression and disobedience. To receive the forgiveness available in the blood of the cross, one must obey [Heb. 5:7-8].)

How Are Men Saved?

By Louis Rushmore

Out of boundless love, God the Father sent his son Jesus Christ into the world to die for our sins. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us was part of God’s grace and mercy by which we are saved. The sacrifice of Christ and grace permits a just God to grant forgiveness of sins; Christ’s sacrifice and mercy permits a just God to withhold punishment for sins. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

Through grace God gives men what they do not deserve

(salvation), and through mercy God does not give men what they do deserve (punishment). However, the grace and mercy of God which results in salvation is conditional upon man's obedience to the Gospel.

With no less love for our souls, Jesus Christ willingly died for us. "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Through his shed blood Christ saves us. "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Revelation 1:5). "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

Also, as mediator between God the Father and ourselves Jesus saves us. "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:4-5). However, Christ as mediator and his blood save men conditionally.

The Holy Spirit's role in conversion relates primarily to the provision of inspired revelation (the Word of God). Second Peter 1:20-21 summarizes the way in which Scripture was communicated from God to man. "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Holy Spirit, along with God and Jesus Christ, participates with men in their conversion. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). That joint participation of the Godhead with us in the forgiveness of

sins is non-miraculous and through the Word of God.

All that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have done to arrange for the forgiveness of sins is conditional upon man's obedience to God's plan of salvation recorded in the Gospel (the New Testament portion of the Bible). First, one must examine what the Bible teaches about salvation in order for faith to develop. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Without faith salvation is impossible. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6); "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).

However, faith only is useless. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20). "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Though men cannot earn salvation, God refuses to grant forgiveness of sins to men who refuse to obey him.

Faith is followed by repentance. All men are required to repent or perish. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

Profession before others of one's faith in Jesus Christ naturally occurs next. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). One New Testament character worded his profession: ". . . I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:38).

Baptism (immersion) is the point at which sins are forgiven. "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us

(not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Baptism, though, does not save without the Godhead's role in salvation as well as man's part in his own salvation (i.e., hearing, believing, repenting, professing).

God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have done their parts toward saving men. However, man also has a role in his own salvation according to Philippians 2:12. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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" (Philippians 2:12).

Man's role is summarized in the Bible as obedience. Speaking of Jesus, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:8-9). Obedience is the conditional basis of the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's roles in our salvation.

Men who do not obey the Gospel will be lost. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Dear Reader, are you saved? Have you obeyed the Gospel yet? The Father Son, and Holy Spirit have done their parts toward your salvation. It only remains for you to fulfill your role in your own salvation.

Miracles of the Bible

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs

The idea of a miracle holds fascination for many people because it is charged with enigma. Strange and unknown things somehow appeal to the human psyche. Everybody talks about miracles but few know what they are talking about. The first step in discussing miracles is to say what we are talking about and note what we are not talking about. The purpose of this study is to consider the miracles of the Bible. We are not surveying unusual events in the human experience that some wrongly call miracles and that have no connection with the Word of God. Things like Unidentified Flying Objects and little green men with antennae coming out of their heads and long, snake-like fingers, and squeaky voices are figment and not miracle. Neither are we discussing the magician's tricks. Furthermore, not every strange thing that is difficult to explain is a miracle.

The word "miracle" in the New Testament translates two Greek words. These two words are variously translated "miracle, sign, token, wonder, ability, power, might, strength, violence, and virtue." The King James translators use the word 37 times. The American Standard translators use the word only 9 times. Often where the King James translates "miracle" the American Standard uses the word "sign." A miracle is a sign, but not every sign is a miracle.

The New Testament speaks of signs or miracles performed by agency of the devil. In warning of a coming apostasy, Paul wrote: Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as

from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise: for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming; even he, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:1-11). The lawless one would come with the power of Satan to perform signs and lying wonders. In the book of Revelation the miraculous power of evil spirits is mentioned. "And he doeth great signs (miracles), that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men" (Rev 13:13).

"And he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs (miracles) which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who hath the stroke of the sword and lived" (Rev. 13:14). "For they are spirits of demons, working signs (miracles); which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" (Rev. 16:14). "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs (miracles) in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast and them that

worshipped his image: they two were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20). Malignant spirits, under the control of the great Red Dragon, were able to perform wonders and signs to deceive people and bring them under the power of the Prince of Darkness. When the empire of Satan is utterly crushed by the heavenly army of the Captain of our salvation, these wonder working spirits will be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

In the book of Acts we are told of a pretender to magic powers who amazed the people with his sorcery. "But there was a certain man, Simon by name, who beforetime in the city used sorcery, and amazed the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is that power of God which is called Great. And they gave heed to him, because that of long time he had amazed them with his sorceries" (Acts 8:8-11). Simon of Samaria was a charlatan, but the people were fooled. His humbug was effective. He was a fraud, but the people didn't know it. The great and the small in the city of Samaria thought Simon was the real thing. They jumped on his bandwagon.

This Samaritan, Simon, was a conscious agent for Satan, and knew he was using trickery to deceive the people. Every generation produces swindlers who exploit gullible people eager to believe in voodooism. It is strange that people would rather accept claptrap than truth. The kind of signs these people do cannot favorably compare with bona fide miracles. Philip, a preacher of righteousness, came to Samaria and when the people of Samaria "heard and saw" the signs which he did they knew they had been bamboozled by Simon.

"And the multitudes gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did. For from many of those that had unclean spirits, they came out, crying with a loud voice: and many that were palsied, and that were lame, were healed. And there was much

joy in that city" (Acts 8:6-8).

Satan has real power and can pull wool over the eyes of sincere folks. We need to be alert to this and not allow ourselves to be hoodwinked by quacks. To be guided by astrology, Tarot cards, alchemy, palm readers, and fortune-tellers is about as sensible as making life-changing decisions on the basis of a message found in a Chinese after-dinner-cookie.

In the first century, the devil was allowed to use his mystical power without limit. The wonder-working power of God was also fully unleashed. There was a great contest. The supernatural power of God was arrayed against the supernatural power of the devil. The devil lost! Demon possession of Bible times was a display of Satan's power. In the case of the woman with the "spirit of infirmity," we are told that Satan had bound her for eighteen years (Luke 13:16). The maid with "a spirit of divination" was a tool of evil spirits (Acts 16:16-18). Every time demons came into contact with one having the supernatural power of God, the demon lost. In each case, the demon was cast out. In one case, demons were sent into a herd of swine (Matt. 8:31-32). They could not predominate in the presence of divine omnipotence.

Satan was defeated. Jesus' victory over death was the final blow. Evil was pulverized. The terms of surrender were dictated by the conquering Christ. He who used his power to bind many was himself bound. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, And gave gifts unto men" (Eph. 4:8). "And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time" (Rev. 20:2-3). The vanquished Satan will never again be allowed to use his supernatural power to afflict humanity. God also restricts his

power to natural means by his own choice. We have the sweet assurance that "there hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Having looked at fake miracles and having considered Satanic signs, we now consider the miracles performed by the power of God that are recorded in the New Testament. A study of supernatural acts executed by divine power will demonstrate the nature of miracles performed in the name of God. There are several conditions that determine what constitutes a miracle performed by the power of the Creator. First, the heavenly miracles of the first century were always successful. No applicant for miraculous healing in the days of Jesus and the apostles ever went away disappointed. And the report of him went forth into all Syria: and they brought unto him all that were sick, holden with divers diseases and torments, possessed with demons, and epileptic, and palsied; and he healed them (Matt. 4:24). "And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick" (Matt. 8:16). "And Jesus perceiving it withdrew from thence: and many followed him; and he healed them all" (Matt. 12:15). "And he came forth, and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14). "And there came unto him great multitudes, having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and they cast them down at his feet; and he healed them" (Matt. 15:30). "And when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them" (Luke 4:40).

There were no failures! No one ever went away from a "healing service" of Jesus or the apostles still sick, possessed, or bound. We are told of an epileptic the disciples of Jesus

could not heal, but the Lord healed him (Matt. 17:15-18). There was no failure in this situation. Jesus, we are told, "did not many mighty works" in Nazareth (Matt. 13:58). The reason he did not do many miracles in his hometown was not that he could not do it, but the people did not believe him and therefore did not come to him for healing. He was not going to break their doors down to demonstrate his divine credentials. If a person wants to reject Jesus, he is allowed to do it. This, obviously, does not constitute failure, but lack of opportunity.

There never was a failure. So, the first thing we learn is that God-authorized miracles never fail. No sufferer who applied to Jesus or his disciples for healing was told that his lack of faith caused the cure not to materialize. Second, the cure was always perfect. No person was ever partially cured. If God heals supernaturally, the cure must be complete, or the power of God is inadequate. It is true that on one occasion at Bethsaida a blind man was brought to Jesus with a request that he be healed (Mark 8:22). Jesus "spit on his eyes" and said "Seest thou aught" (Mark 8:23). The man answered, "I see men, for I behold them as trees, walking" (Mark 8:24). Jesus laid his hands upon the man and he "saw all things clearly" (Mark 8:25). Why Jesus healed this man in stages I do not know, but it is true that the blind man never left the presence of Jesus until he "saw all things clearly." In supernatural healing there is never a period of recuperation. The sick person does not begin to get better and over a period of weeks or months or years finally recover health. Miracles of healing always take place instantly. Third, there was no relapse. There is not a single instance in all of the New Testament where any person healed by the power of God ever suffered from the same complaint. A blind person who received his sight did not at a later time retrogress to darkness. The miracles of Jesus and the apostles were long lasting. Fourth, it was instantaneous. There was no waiting period. The cure was always abrupt.

“Now Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man that was lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the door of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked to receive an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up: and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength. And leaping up, he stood, and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they took knowledge of him, that it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him” (Acts 3:1-10). The God-authorized miracles of the New Testament were always without failure, or setback, perfect, and immediate. Anything that purports to be a miracle but that does not have these earmarks is not a God-authorized miracle. It may be a man-made fraud, it may be a Satan inspired fake, but it is not an act of God.

The miracles performed by approval of Jehovah in the New Testament were for the purpose of confirming revelation. God spoke through his appointed representatives and then sealed the message by signs and wonders. Nicodemus said to Jesus, “no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). Nicodemus was right about that! The message of the New Testament is confirmed by signs and wonders. “God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will” (Heb. 2:4). If God performed miracles today, they would be available to all and would not be selective. “God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). They would be

immediate and perfect and there would be no regression. The purpose of God's miracles was to confirm his word. "God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will" (Heb. 2:4). "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Amen" (Mark 16:20). When that purpose was realized, miracles ceased. Satan is defeated. The truth is established. Miracles are no more. They are not needed. If miracles had remained after the truth of the gospel was certified to be of God, then many people would follow Jesus for the wrong reason. If believers are put under a glass and protected from sickness and hurting, many would come to Jesus for the loaves and fishes. We are cautioned to not labor for the meat that is perishing, but for that which endures to eternal life (John 6:27).

"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory" (Col. 3:1-4).

Has Man Outgrown the Gospel?

By Allen Webster

Vol. 107, No. 11

Time is changing. The new soon becomes old; the modern becomes ancient; the technological breakthrough becomes yesterday's news; the popular becomes lost in the latest; and the up-to-

date is soon out-of-date.

Eternal truth never changes. It reads the same today as yesterday and as it will tomorrow. It is "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). Those who would change it become "accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9) and find that it will meet them in judgment unchanged (Rev. 20:12).

Modern man feels he has outgrown the ancient gospel. He thinks an absolute standard is obsolete. Exaltation of self and sensuality replace the idea of sin and spiritual death. He ridicules blood and the need for forgiveness. He scoffs at the virgin birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, and miraculous resurrection of Christ. He regards these as myths of a bygone era.

Has Man Outgrown the Gospel?

Never! The only way man can outgrow the gospel is to conquer sin. He has not. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" was true in Paul's day and is true today. Sin is still the transgression of the law of God (I John 3:4), which can include violating one's conscience (Rom. 14:23), omitting a duty (James 4:17), and lawlessness (I John 3:4).

Never! God, not man, determines what is sinful; sin will not change. Men may call sin by another name, but that will not alter what it really is. Forgiveness is still the most basic spiritual need that man has (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23). The only way a person can be forgiven is through the gospel (Rom. 1:16).

Never! The gospel is the power to overcome temptation (Eph. 6:17), and man needs its power because temptation is still with us. Mankind has not conquered carnal desires. He still gives in to the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I John 2:15-17). He cannot overcome without the power of the written word (Heb. 4:12).

Never! The devil is still "as a roaring lion" walking about

“seeking whom he may devour” (I Pet. 5:8). Man is still in danger; therefore he needs the unchanged gospel, for it is God’s great power to save. When humans can defeat Satan without the truth, then they will no longer need the truth. They cannot. No one is strong enough to conquer the Evil One without an “it is written” (Matt. 4:1-11).

Never! The soul of man needs food. If man could invent a substitute for “soul food,” he would not need the gospel, but he has not. Peter stated that the soul feeds on the “sincere milk of the word” (I Pet. 2:2), and Paul wrote that he could progress to eat “strong meat” from the hand of God (Heb. 5:12-14). The gospel fills those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6).

Never! Man still needs a map to heaven. Men try to invent a roadway to heaven, but these maps will only get one lost. If we follow the road of “faith only” or the lane of “direct operation of the Holy Spirit” or the path of “once saved always saved,” we are traveling a broad way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). Only Christ and his gospel can lead one to heaven (John 14:6). “I must needs go home by the way of the cross; there’s no other way but this.”

Jesus plainly stated the conditions by which men can reach much needed salvation. A sinner must believe in Christ (Mark 16:16), decide to change his sinful life (repent) (Luke 13:5), confess the sweet name of Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:4). We can choose to heed these scriptures or harass them, to read them or reject them, to respect them or ridicule them. Still, the same ancient gospel is the cure for all the spiritual ills of men! Why not obey today?

Working the Works of God

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs

Vol. 121, No. 08

The Bible teaches that works have nothing to do with salvation, and it teaches that works are necessary to salvation.

Still, the Bible does not contradict itself.

How can this be? How can the Bible say two things that seem to be diametrically opposed and yet not contradict itself? It would appear to be self-evident that works cannot be both necessary and unnecessary to salvation.

Since the Bible is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), it must be true and therefore cannot contradict itself. Truth, in order to be truth, must be coherent. If two statements contradict, either one or both of them must be false, but there is no way they can both be true. How, then, do we deal with the fact that the Bible says works are not necessary to justification, and also says that we are justified by works?

Some assume a “take your pick” attitude and go blithely down the path not knowing how to reconcile the two statements – and, possibly, not caring. The honest person however cannot do this and must either reject the Bible or find a logical way to harmonize the two statements.

Various Works

To understand the Bible we must define its terms correctly. It is necessary to understand accurately how Bible writers use the word “works” (sometimes “deeds”), or we will be confused. A survey of how the Bible uses this word will help us to avoid the confusion of misunderstanding. A failure to understand something correctly leads to incomprehension and perhaps

unbelief.

Following is a partial list of “work(s)” mentioned in the Old and New Testaments:

- The work God does – Gen. 2:2; Judges 2:7; Ps. 71:17; 1 Cor. 12:6; John 6:28-29; John 10:37; John 14:10
- The work man does in providing food and shelter – Gen. 3:17-19; Exod. 23:12; Exod. 26:1; Eccl. 2:4; Matt. 21:28
- The work man does in obeying specific commands of God – Gen. 6:13-22; John 9:4; 1 Cor. 15:58
- Work of iniquity (evil) – Ps. 6:8; Ps. 14:1; Jer. 1:16; Ezek. 33:26; Matt. 7:23; Luke 13:27; John 3:19; Rom. 1:27; Eph. 4:19; Rom. 13:12 (“works of darkness”); Gal. 5:19-21 (“works of the flesh”)
- Work of righteousness (good) – Ps. 15:2; Acts 10:35; Matt. 5:16; Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 9:8; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; James 1:4; James 3:13
- Works that are worthy of repentance – Acts 26:20
- The mighty works (signs, miracles) of Jesus – Matt. 11:23-24; John 10:32; Acts 2:22
- Works of the Law of Moses – Rom. 3:20; Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; Gal. 3:2
- Greater works done by Jesus’ disciples – John 5:20; John 14:12
- Good and bad works by which all men shall be judged – Rom. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12-13; Rev. 22:12
- Human works apart from works of God – Rom. 9:11; Rom. 11:6
- Converts to Jesus – 1 Cor. 3:14
- Apostolic signs, and wonders, and mighty works – 2 Cor. 12:12
- Work of sinless perfection – Eph. 2:9; Col. 2:21-23
- The power that works in the saved – Eph. 3:20; Eph. 4:12
- The word of God that works in the believer – 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:10; 1 Tim. 5:12; 2 Tim. 2:21

- Works that justify – James 2:24; James 3:13
- Works of the devil – 1 John 3:8
- The ungodly works of ungodliness – Jude 1:15

This gives a sample of various “works” mentioned in the Bible. It is a mistake to suppose that the word work(s) always refers to condition of acceptance with God. It does not!

Even a casual glance at this list will convince the thoughtful Bible student this is a complicated subject, having many interrelated parts. It is difficult to deal with because of the need to take different relationships or points of view into consideration.

The mighty acts of Jehovah are works. Creation (Ps. 8:3-6; Ps. 19:1; Ps. 33:4; Ps. 92:5; Ps. 102:25; Ps. 104:24), redemptive acts in history like the Exodus (Judges 2:7-10).

Jesus is our perfect example in all things (1 Pet. 2:21). The Savior went about doing good (Acts 10:38-39; John 4:34; John 5:36; John 10:25-38; John 15:24; John 17:4). His words and his works confirmed his authority and mission.

Humans are sinless at birth, seeing that Jehovah is the Father and Giver of the human spirit (Heb. 12:9; Eccl. 12:7). As the child matures it comes to understand that some things are right and other things are wrong, but chooses to do wrong things and ignore right things. This is called sin – sin of omission and sin of commission. This is the something a person knowingly does to himself. Iniquity separates a soul from its God (Isa. 59:2). Those who die in sin cannot go where Jesus is; they “shall not inherit the kingdom of God (John 8:21; Gal. 5:19-21).

In his infinite compassion Jehovah sent Jesus to offer himself sacrifice for sins (John 3:16; John 10:18; Matt. 26:28).

We access the grace of God and the blood of the Lamb of God through belief (John 8:24).

“They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28-29).

Saving belief is a work that includes other works. Faith is shown by works (James 2:18). “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). Abraham was justified by works produced by faith (James 2:21-22). Works make faith perfect (James 2:22). Sinners are justified by works and not by faith only (James 2:24). Faith without works is dead (James 2:26).

Jesus said, “He that believeth (a work) and is baptized (a work) shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (James 2:22). In baptism the sinner, “is buried with Christ” and is “raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12). In baptism we are buried “with” Christ and we are raised “with” him believing that God will keep his promise to save “he that believeth and is baptized.” Peter tells us that baptism saves (1 Pet. 3:21). In baptism our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16).

The spirit that is born again in the water of baptism (John 3:5) enters the kingdom of God, where faith continues to work, bringing glory to God (Matt. 5:16). The saved “work the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 16:10), abound “in every good work” (1 Cor. 9:8). Servants of righteousness “end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:5). The child of God is “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph. 2:10); the saint is “fruitful unto every good work” (Col. 1:10). The Christian “works out his own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). Paul prayed that God the Father may “comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2 Thess. 2:17). Women professing godliness are to adorn themselves “with good works” (1 Tim. 2:10). If a man desires the office of bishop, he desires “a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). Widows to be enrolled are to be “well reported of for good

works" (1 Tim. 5:10). The new covenant lauds the good works of some that are "evident, and cannot be hid" (1 Tim. 5:25). Those described as "a vessel unto honor" are "prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). "The man of God" is "furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). Preachers are to be "an ensample of good works" (Titus 2:7), "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). Followers of Jesus are to "be ready unto every good work" (Titus 3:1). Paul desired "that they who have believed God may be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8). "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister" (Heb. 6:10). "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). Our Lord Jesus "make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:21).

The "wise and understanding among you? let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13). Behave seemly among the pagans, "that, wherein they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12). "My Little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth (1 John 3:18). Jesus knows and commends the works of his disciples on earth (Rev. 2:2, Rev. 2:9, Rev. 2:19; Rev. 3:8). Those who die in the Lord are blessed because "their works follow with them" (Rev. 14:13).

On the last great judgment day, God will render unto every man "according to their works, whether they be good or evil" (Eccl. 12:14; Rev. 20:12-13; Rev. 22:12).

It is because of a present and future judgment that we must avoid the works of the flesh ... the works of darkness ... the works of the devil. Abstaining from all evil works is critical to the believer.

In the light of what the new covenant has to say about the importance of good works – works of faith – works that justify (James 2:24) – it seems strange that anyone would say that works have nothing to do with salvation ... unless, of course, he is blinded by denominational dogma.

The Bible does warn us that we cannot live to maturity and be sinless (Rom. 3:27; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 4:2-6). “All sin and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). It also tells us the works of the Law of Moses cannot save us (Rom. 9:32; Gal. 2:16; Gal. 3:10). If eternal salvation could come by the Mosaic Law, then the death of Jesus was needless, because the people had that law for 1,500 years before Jesus was born of a woman (Gal. 2:21). We are also told that we cannot save ourselves by austerities (Col. 2:18).

Some honest person may be misled into wrongly supposing that when the Bible tells us we cannot be saved by our own works because it is not possible for us to live without sin – sooner or later all will sin and fall short of God’s glory, that it is saying that even works of faith and righteousness – works of God – do not save. Also some will read Bible passages which say that the works of the Law of Moses cannot save, and mistakenly conclude that works have nothing to do with salvation. This study should clear that up because it gives indisputable proof that there is no justification without works.

It is indisputably true that works are necessary to justification (James 2:24), but it is also true that some works cannot save – the work of living a perfectly sinless life – the work of devising our own scheme of redemption – the works of the Law of Moses – the works of darkness, which are the works of Satan.

So, it is true that works both save us and have nothing to do with our salvation, depending on what kind of works you are talking about.

It is not possible for a reasonable adult to be sinless and therefore, in this sense, one cannot save himself by his own works. We cannot be saved by the works of Satan, nor by the works of the Law of Moses, nor by any human invention. Such works have no power to save and many of them are an offense to God.

Still, it is true that the work of faith (the works produced by faith, see Rom. 1:5; Rom. 16:26), bring the sinner into a right relationship with his Creator, help to maintain that relationship, and will one day be the reason for his promotion to glory (Matt. 25:31-46). To say that works have nothing to do with salvation is to fly in the face of Bible teaching.

*P.O. Box 690192
Houston, TX 77269-0192*