Apostasy

By C. R. Nichols
Vol. 114, No. 09

> *I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, be is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned John 15:1-6).*

In this passage Jesus represented himself as the "true vine" and declared that his disciples were "branches." All the "branches" (disciples) are said to be in the "vine" – that is, "in Christ." Some of the "branches" in him are said to "bear fruit," and some of the "branches" in him are said to be fruitless. The Lord said: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away. …If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." To me it seems the lesson to be learned from the foregoing passage is too clear to be lost on the honest reader.

Those who teach that it is not possible for a child of God to so conduct himself as to be lost, in their effort to break the force of the passage we now study, declare that the non-fruit-bearing branches are not, in fact, in the "vine" (Christ); that they are no more than "water sprouts"; that they are only nominally in the vine, not in the vine in fact; that they have

no vital connection with the vine. Is it not strange to you that the Lord did not have at his command language sufficient to express his thought? True, the Lord says the non-fruit-bearing branches are “in” him – in Christ; and to save a theory, here comes some teacher and declares they were not “in” the vine – that is, they had no vital connection with the vine. Indeed, if they had no vital connection with the vine, what is the necessity of taking them away? Would they not have withered and died without the necessity of being taken away?

The Lord says the branches that bore fruit were “in” the vine; and, too, he declared the branches that did not bear fruit were “in” the vine.

In Christ

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). “Salvation” is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). The non-fruit-bearing branches are said to be in Christ; and that being true, they were saved, for salvation is in Christ. They enjoyed the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14). But because some of these branches did not bear fruit, it is said they were taken away and cast into the fire and burned. The destiny of such branches will be the opposite of that which the righteous enjoy. In the face of this plain lesson in the word of God, some insist that when one time a man becomes a Christian, there is no possibility of his failure to enter heaven.

Become a Castaway

“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27). The American Standard Version reads, “I buffet my body,” instead of, “I keep under my body.” The Greek word from which “keep under” is rendered is from a word which means to “strike one upon the part beneath the eye; to beat black and blue; hence, to discipline by hardships”

(Bagster). “To beat black and blue, to smite so as to cause bruises and livid spots. …Like a boxer, I buffet my body, handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships 1 Cor. 9:27.” (Thayer.) The word is derived from the practice of athletes training by subjecting the body to severe discipline to make it strong and able to stand great strain. It then came to have the meaning of treating harshly. Paul buffeted his body he brought it into subjection, he beat it down. Why? “Lest … when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” What is the import of the “castaway”? Among the ancients, as well as in our day, metals are tested; and if a piece of metal does not meet the necessary standard for a certain work, it is cast away – that is, it is rejected. The word is found in the following passages and rendered “castaway,” “reprobate,” “rejected”:

- Romans 1:28: Gave them over to “reprobate mind.”
- 1 Corinthians 9:27: “I myself should be a castaway.”
- 2 Corinthians 13:5: “Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.”
- 2 Timothy 3:8: “Reprobate concerning the faith.”
- Titus 1:16: “Unto every good work reprobate.”

In the chapter from which the verse we are studying is taken Paul is discussing games in which people in his day engaged, especially contests in which physical supremacy was tested, and became the decisive feature, other things being equal. The prize awarded to the successful one in the contest was a crown of leaves – a crown or wreath made of pine straw, olive, or laurel leaves. Those who would contest for the prize were required to undergo a course of training for several weeks; they were required to make oath that they had trained the required length of time; that they were not guilty of crime; that they were freemen and upright in character. Each one who would compete in the arena was paraded before the crowd, and it was challenged to lodge against any of the prospective contestants any charge that would disqualify him from the

games. If one of the participants did not “strive lawfully,” he was disqualified, and at times such a one was chased from the arena in disgrace. Judges were chosen for the different divisions of the games, and for some time before the contests the ones who were to contend for the prize were required to train before the ones who would judge them. To these games Paul makes reference, saying: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” – lest I be declared a “reprobate” and rejected at the final day of rewards.

I was thoroughly disgusted at the only serious attempt I have heard by those who declare one cannot fall from grace and be lost. My opponent said:

> *Paul entertained grave fears that the opposition which was hurled against him, even from false brethren, would result in a wave of protest against him; that he would allow his body to fall into sin and bring about his rejection as a preacher; that his brethren would cast him out of the ministry, silence him as a preacher. He had no fears of his final acceptance with God; he was certain of his entrance finally into heaven; but he was fearful that some of those in the church who had questioned his authority as an apostle would bring to bear the weight of their influence and cause the churches to reject him – cast him away.*

Paul was not discussing the possibility of being misunderstood, nor of being misrepresented, and, as a result of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, being rejected by his brethren; but he was careful to conduct himself in such a way that he would not be rejected at the last day. He was alive to the necessity of buffeting his body, bringing it into subjection and keeping it into subjection.

In the Christian race, which Paul and all other Christians are

running, it is necessary that we strive lawfully. One is not to allow the body full swing and meet its every demand, but to bring it into subjection, beat it down, lest the Judge, the Judge who awards the crown, finds fault and rejects you. But the Judge who is to reward the man striving in the Christian race makes no mistakes. Under him you are to train for the continued contest, and by him you will be rewarded at the last day. Paul declares he was making the effort to keep his body in subjection, lest be become a reprobate, lest he be rejected at the last day. Surely if one who saw the Lord, one who served as an apostle, preached so extensively, could become a "castaway," it is necessary for you also to take care.

Holy Spirit in the New Testament

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs
Vol. 107, No. 02

- I. Introduction
  - A. The writers of the Old Testament looked for a time when the Holy Spirit would do a greater work than was done in their day.
  - B. They stressed the importance of words that would be spoken and written because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Consider the importance of the words of revelation.
    - 1. "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the

opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he may be glorified" (Isa. 61:1-3).

- 2. The context of this passage shows these words were spoken to Judah before the Babylonian captivity and refer to the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple but have a second and ultimate fulfillment in Jesus (See Luke 4:16-21). The message was from "the Spirit of the Lord Jehovah."

- C. The power and importance of the revealed word is emphasized. The word heard, revealed, preached, believed and obeyed is dominant.
  - 1. Matthew 4:12-17 and Isaiah 9:1-2– Jesus began to preach.
  - 2. Matthew 11:2-6; Isaiah 35:5-10–gospel is preached.
  - 3. Matthew 12:15-21 and Isaiah 42:1 -4–Jehovah's servant shall declare judgment.
  - 4. Matthew 13:14-17 and Isaiah 6:9-10– see, hear, believe.
  - 5. Matthew 13:35 and Psalms 78:1-3– teach and reveal.
  - 6. Luke 4:16-2 1 and Isaiah 61:1-3–preach good tidings.
  - 7. John 12:37-41 and Isaiah 53:1; Isaiah 6:9-10–a message is to be believed.
- D. The Bible deals with the message more than the

messenger. The real messenger was the Holy Spirit, and, being God, he is deep, inscrutable, and incomprehensible, but we can grasp the words the Holy Spirit revealed.

- II. The Holy Spirit and the Word in the New Testament
  - A. John the Baptist was a forerunner.
    - 1. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15).
    - 2. He was to prepare the way for Messiah (Isaiah 40:3).
    - 3. He would turn the hearts of the people to God (Malachi 4:5-6).
    - 4. He did his work by exhortation and preaching (Luke 3:18)
  - B. The work of Jesus was planned by God.
    - 1. "He that hath received his witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for he giveth not the Spirit by measure. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:34-36).
      - a) Note: Jesus is the one God sent. Jesus spoke the words of God: for (the reason is) he (God) giveth not the Spirit by measure. Obviously, the one who spoke the words of God, is the one who received the Spirit without measure—Jesus received the spirit without measure.
      - b) Others must have received the Spirit by measure; otherwise it does not make sense to say Jesus had an immeasurable measure of the Spirit.

- 2. Emphasis was put on the teaching (the words) of Jesus: “Never man so spake” (John 7:46).
    - a) “The multitudes were astonished at his teaching” (Matt. 7:28).
    - b) “Hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5).
    - c) “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).
    - d) “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that y, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock” (Matt. 7:21-24).
    - e) “It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).
    - f) “No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the

Father, save he that is from God, he hath seen the Father" (John 6:44-46).

- g) "Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth and am come from God; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof. But because I say the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convicteth me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:42-47)
- h) "If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also: from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works" (John

14:7-10; Amos 1:1). Daniel said, ‘ ‘heard I the voice of his words” (Dan. 10:9). Balaam said, ‘ ‘The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak” (Num. 22:38).

Comments on the Outline

God instructs the people of earth through the medium of words. The Holy Spirit used words in instructing chosen leaders who repeated the words to the public. The words would sometimes come to the receiver through the eye, at other times through the ear, and occasionally the words were put in the mouth, but the message always came in the signs and symbols of ideas and was communicated to the people in words.

“The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel….” (Amos 1:1). Daniel said, “heard I the voice of his words” (Dan.lO:9). Balaam said, “The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak” (Num. 22:3 8).

The Bible stresses the importance of inspired writings. The New Testament says the Holy Spirit influences human minds through a medium, except in some miracles—*miracles confined to the first century.*

God made the world by the creative power of his spoken word. God said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters.” God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place.” God said, “Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth: and it was so.” God spoke, and it was done. “By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3).

“… It is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness,

who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Paul's argument is that the same God who called light out of darkness in the beginning, de- monstrated how weighty and mighty his word is, by giving the revelation of his gospel of salvation. We dare not ignore nor belittle it.

The force of God's word is well documented in the Bible. The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). Still, some misguided souls call it "the mere word" and "the dead letter." Those who faithfully follow the teaching of the Bible are called strict constructionists and legalists. These terms are used in derision and are not unlike the Jews' calling Jesus a Samaritan to disgrace him. Jesus set the proper response pattern for us when he discounted their slap by saying they dishonored him and pointed out that he was doing his Father's will, but they were not so disposed. The apostle argues we do not handle the word of God deceitfully. ..The gods of this world blind the minds of the unbelieving to prevent them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ…We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God" (2 Cor. 4:1-7). He calls the scriptures "the word of God…the gospel of the glory of Christ…a treasure…an exceeding great power."

We do not war according to the flesh, but "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full" (2 Cor. 10:5-6).

Our obedience is to be full, complete, perfect. It is the Comforter—the Holy Spirit—who gives to us divine revelation. "Wherefore, even as the Holy Spirit saith, Today if ye shall hear his voice" (Heb. 3:7). "Brethren, it was needful that the scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spake before by the mouth of David concerning Judas" (Acts 1:16).

“The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, And his word was upon my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). “But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1).

The word of truth revealed by the Holy Spirit is sufficient and adequate to make sinners acceptable to God. We are not to follow the ambiguous leadings of doubtful feelings but are to submit to the absolute standard of scripture inspired of God.

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

“Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth” (Matt. 6:10).

“The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul: The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalms 19:7).

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

“And that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

“It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, are life” (John 6:63).

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:2).

“But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty,

and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing" (James 1:25).

"For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves" (James 1:22).

"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently: having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever, For, all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth: But the word of the Lord abideth for ever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you" (1 Peter 1:22-25).

"For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

"Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth finished their God-given assignments through the power of words. The overriding importance of the message is prominent in the God-given scriptures (writings). As we look at the work of the Holy

Spirit in the lives of the apostles of Jesus, certain disciples in the first century, and all the saved, we will understand more fully the Spirit's work of revealing, confirming, and protecting the plan of salvation as given in the new covenant.

"Now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give {you} the inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Inexcusable Excuses

By Terry R. Townsend
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Have you ever thought about what folks might say to God at judgment for their failure to obey him? It's sobering, isn't it, to know there's a coming judgment – a day in which all men will give account of themselves to the Lord! Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Let's consider a few inexcusable excuses.

Without question, millions of people will blame their lack of obedience on preachers. Unfortunately, millions today put more faith in mortal man than they do God. Yet, the Bible is abundantly clear that one must be a doer of the word and not a hearer only (James 1:21-25). False teachers are deceiving millions into thinking they have "peace and safety," when in reality they're on a collision course with destruction (1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). Thus, it behooves us to test the spirits (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11). Blaming false teachers at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

There will be many on the Day of Judgment blaming the weather for their lack of involvement in the Lord's work. When asked why they fail to participate in spiritual activities, many blame mother nature – too hot in summer, too cold in winter, too wet in spring, too windy in fall, etc. If truth be told, people will do whatever their hearts so desire! Inclement weather does not negate one's responsibility to serve God (1 Cor. 15:58). Blaming the weather at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

Undoubtedly, millions will blame their parents at Judgment for their failure to do God's will. How often have I heard non-members say the following in a Bible study, "I see what you're saying, but if what I believe was good enough for dad and mom, it's good enough for me!" But what if dad and mom were wrong? Will God still grant you entrance into Heaven despite your failure to obey that which you knew to be true? The Bible says that one must obey Christ above all else, including family (cf. Luke 9:57-62; 14:26-35). In matters of faith, who should we ultimately listen to? Parents or Christ? Obviously, the answer is Jesus (Matt. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-3). Putting the blame on parents for your lack of obedience will be an inexcusable excuse.

Others at Judgment will use the excuse of profession for their failing to do the Father's Will. I'm sure some will say, "I would have obeyed and served you Lord, but my job wouldn't allow it." Truth be told, millions are more interested in money than they are in God. Paul had it right when he penned, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim. 6:9-10 ESV). Jesus said that we're to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). To blame one's profession at Judgment will be an

inexcusable excuse.

I’m sure that on Judgment Day some will use their lack of earthly substance (poverty) as an excuse for their failing to do the will of God. Some will probably say, “Lord, I wasn’t as blessed as others; thus, I didn’t do all I could.” I wonder if God will have standing beside Him the widow who gave two mites as an example to those making such excuses (cf. Mark 12:41-44)? The Lord expects us to do what we can with what we have (Matt. 25:14 ff). Blaming our lack of service on poverty will be an inexcusable excuse.

Another excuse many will make at Judgment will be that of persecution. I can hear some now, “Lord, I would’ve served You, but I didn’t because I feared persecution.” But didn’t he tell us in his word that Christians would be mistreated on occasion (cf John 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12). Didn’t he assure us his presence, protection, and panoply to help us overcome (cf. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6; Eph. 6:10 ff)? Jesus said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Thus, fear of persecution as a defense for failing to obey God will be an inexcusable excuse on Judgment Day.

Finally, millions will offer unto God the excuse of procrastination; that is, many will say, “I wanted to obey You Lord, but I simply ran out of time!” I wonder if Felix will be among the masses who will make such an excuse (Acts 24:25)? The Lord is patient, and he gives men ample time to obey (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9-14); thus, to use procrastination as a reason for failing to obey will be an inexcusable excuse on Judgment Day.

Simply put, we can make all the excuses we want to as to why we fail to do God’s Will; however, on the Day of Judgment, God’s answer to such excuses will be this:

“Depart from me, ye that work iniquity!”

Cotham’s Comments on the Holy Spirit

By Perry B. Cotham
Vol. 108, No. 08

A misconception of the Holy Spirit and his work for man’s salvation leads to all kinds of religious errors. All that we can ever know about the Spirit and his work comes from the Scriptures. It is tragic to see some turn away from what the Bible teaches in favor of an inner, mystical longing, which they mistake for information about God.

The Holy Spirit is a person. There are three beings in one Godhead (Acts 17:29; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). There is only one God (Deut. 6:4), but three beings possess the divine nature.

The Holy Spirit gave us the Holy Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21; Eph. 6:17). The apostles were guided by the Spirit into all of the truth (John 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 1:3). In conviction, conversion, and edification the Holy Spirit operates on the heart of man only through the inspired Word of God (Psa. 19:7; Psa. 73:24; Psa. 119:50, Psa. 119:93, Psa. 119:105, Psa. 119:130). “The Gospel … is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). The Spirit operates through the words of revelation, which are spirit and life (John 6:63).

The Bible plainly says that the Holy Spirit dwells within Christians. Paul wrote, “Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19).

How does the Spirit indwell the child of God? He indwells directly or indirectly. There is a difference in stating the fact and in stating the method (the how) of the Spirit's indwelling. The Bible does not teach that the Spirit dwells in Christians apart from the inspired Word. Many religionists have the idea of a personal, direct indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the child of God. They think the Spirit gives the believer extra help besides the Word of God. This, of course, denies the all-sufficiency of God-breathed writing to make the man of God complete. Of course, this belief leads to all kinds of "experiences" and "feelings."

Let us note some things: (1) God dwells in Christians (2 Cor. 6:16; 1 John 4:12-16). Does God dwell in his children directly or indirectly? It is indirect, through obedience to the word: "He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him" (1 John 3:24). (2) Christ dwells in Christians (Col. 1:27). But how does Christ dwell in us? Paul explains, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph. 3:17). "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). (3) The Holy Spirit dwells in Christians. The Spirit is in each faithful member of the church the same way that God and Christ are in the saved. Neither God, Christ, nor the Holy Spirit dwells directly, personally, in Christians. As the Christian obeys the Spirit's message, the Spirit's influences are in him, and he brings forth the fruit of the Spirit in his life: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Comparing Ephesians 5:17-19 with Colossians 3:16 shows how the Spirit is in the child of God. To be "filled with the Spirit" is to let the "word of Christ" dwell in you richly. There is no statement of Scripture saying the Holy Spirit dwells literally, directly, and personally in the child of God. If Jehovah the Father and Jesus the Son can indwell Christians indirectly and figuratively, the Holy Spirit can do the same.

Children of God cherish the Spirit's message and live by it, and in this way the Holy Spirit dwells in them and in the church. The teaching that the Spirit works directly – separate and apart from the Word of God in the heart of the alien sinner or the child of God, is contrary to the teaching of the Bible. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God … that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We have the Bible and it is sufficient to make us what God wants us to be.

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.

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