***The Great Debate Over Saving Faith  
Romans 15:30-33  
RO193-02***

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Romans 15:30-33, Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support - Segment Number 7. Paul has closed the main body of his letter to the Christians in Rome with a benediction which commends them to the God of peace. God is the God of peace in that His free grace gives a lost sinner who trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation peace with God. Therefore, in Romans 5:1 we read of this expression of the God of peace, where Paul says, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." What Paul is speaking about there is what we described as that outer circle of eternal fellowship, that is peace with God.

But the God of peace also on a daily basis provides us, out of His free grace, the capacity to be filled with the Spirit which we achieve by confession of our known evil. And the result of that is another kind of peace which the Bible calls the peace of God, this settled peace in our daily experience no matter what comes our way. Philippians 4:7 refers to this where Paul says, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This we refer to as the inner circle of temporal fellowship.

The Christian, at the point of his faith in Christ, comes into that inner circle of temporal fellowship as well as eternal fellowship. He can step out of temporal fellowship. He can get into sin and he can get out of that close walk with the Lord, but he could never get out of his eternal fellowship in terms of salvation.

The peace from God, which Paul desires here for the Roman Christians, is the product of God's free grace, both in terms of their salvation, which gets them into the outer circle and in terms of their sanctification, which brings them into the inner circle. It is God's free grace, and that is the issue toward which we direct our attention once more this morning.

**The Question Over Saving Faith**

Receiving peace in one's soul from God begins with an act of saving faith on the part of the lost person. There is now a great theological debate over this issue of saving faith. What is saving faith? It's the only kind that'll get you into Heaven. And when people begin to question and wonder about whether they're really going to Heaven, this is what they're asking about, whether they know it or not, they're asking: 'Have I ever experienced saving faith, the faith that God requires to take me into the family of God?' The question is what constitutes saving faith so that one really has genuine and permanent salvation. Well, there are 2 viewpoints on what constitutes saving faith.

One is called Free Grace Salvation. Free Grace Salvation is by an act of appropriation. It is simply trusting in Jesus Christ alone to save one from hell without the addition of any other human acts. The act of accepting God's Free Grace Salvation is an act of appropriation. This is what is referred to in John 6:47 where Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life," and the context indicates that it is belief in Him as personal Savior. This verse indicates that saving faith from the Bible point of view is an act of appropriation. It is an act of accepting something that God is offering to give you if you are willing to take it, if you believe that He is telling the truth and you are willing to trust Him to take you into Heaven.

The other viewpoint is Lordship Salvation. This is the issue. Does the Bible teach Free Grace Salvation or does the Bible teach Lordship Salvation? And that is a very big issue. Free Grace Salvation says that salvation is about as an act of appropriation on the part of the lost sinner. Lordship Salvation says that salvation comes as an act of commitment, trusting Jesus Christ as Savior indeed, but along with it, an act of committing oneself to obeying him as one's Lord: to add to accepting Christ the intention that you have to live in subjection to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ submission to Him along with faith in Him. This commitment for salvation is viewed as an act of repentance of one's sinful lifestyle before you can come into salvation. First, you have to repent (That repentance is an expression of the fact that you intend to live according to the will of God.), then you trust Christ as Savior, and then you are into the family of God. Lordship Salvation says it is not just appropriating a gift from God. It is also committing yourself to live according to the will of God.

Now, these are diametrically different approaches to salvation: one of these is going to get people into Heaven, the other one is going to take them into the Lake of Fire. They are not just variations of the same thing. This is a very serious misconception which has currently been injected into the Christian community.

**"Pisteuo" - The Greek Word for "Salvation"**

I would remind you that the Greek word for salvation is a very explicit word, it's this word "pisteuo," p i s t e u o. And "pisteuo" means "to trust," and it never implies the addition of any other factor. It's just a very simple word. You can look it up yourself in any Bible dictionary or lexicon, and you'll find that this Greek word simply means that you're going to depend on something or depend on someone. You can trust him. You've got to accept him as being honest in what he tells you and what he will do. It has nothing to do with adding anything of your own.

**True Belief Versus False Belief**

Now, the people who promote Lordship Salvation call "Free Grace Salvation" "cheap grace" and "easy believe-ism." The Free Grace Salvation which God in Scripture offers to the lost person is indeed free, but it is not cheap grace, because it cost Jesus Christ the suffering and the death of the cross. Indeed, God asks nothing more in Scripture than that a lost sinner believe Him when He offers to save one from Hell and does no more than trust His Son, Jesus Christ as Savior. That's not easy believe-ism, that's accepting what God wants you to believe. God says in 1 John 5:10, what you have done in accepting His offer of salvation is in effect declared that you believe that He is telling the truth. If you reject His "belief salvation," then you are indicating that you think He's lying. It's a very serious consequence. Lordship Salvation describes Free Grace Salvation as "a mere intellectual assent to the gospel." They like to compare this as "a head belief without a heart belief."

The Greek word for "believe" means "a mental action;" it means "a mental acceptance of something as being true." So, saving faith is an intellectual conviction. We don't have to get complicated about this. We don't have to get all involved in trying to define words. You know what it means to believe something or not to believe something. You don't believe down here in your heart; your heart is not an organ that can believe. You believe up here with the mentality, which is up in your head, that's part of your soul, that's what you believe with.

Now, there is indeed a false non-saving faith. It is possible for a person to have non-saving faith. But that kind of faith is a faith which has been placed in the wrong object, like the Roman Catholic who trusts his church to bring him into Heaven. Or it is a mere pretense, a calculated pretense to get a desired goal, (i.e. - to get that girl to marry you who won't marry you if you aren't a Christian, so, you make a pretended faith expression). That is indeed a false faith, and it will not get you into Heaven. But to call believing God, taking Him at His Word and accepting His offer of free grace salvation on the basis of trusting His Son to take you into Heaven because He's already covered your sin, to call that cheap grace, to call that easy believe-ism, to call that a mere intellectual ascent, is absolute nonsense and is not compatible with anything you find in Scripture.

**Dealing With the Problem of Continued Sin After Salvation**

So, let's take a look at the status of the problem that all of us have. We are believers in Jesus Christ and yet we sin. I read you several quotations from the writings of John F. MacArthur of the West Coast, who has written the book, "The Gospel According To Jesus", in which he is proposing that Christians do not understand how to get to Heaven because they think that it's cheap grace, easy believe-ism, intellectual assent, and that it's an appropriation. MacArthur says it is not an appropriation, it is a commitment, it is a commitment that you're going to live according to the will of God, if you don't do that, you're not in the family of God. Yet, the problem is all of us are aware of the fact that we sin.

The Lordship Salvation teachers are saying, 'How do you know you're going to Heaven?' In the quietness of the night you wonder, 'Am I really going into eternal life in Heaven? Do I really have that?' The Lordship Salvation teachers say you'll find the answer to that by observing your lifestyle; if you live a godly lifestyle you're going to Heaven, if you are sinning, you're not going to Heaven.

Well, the next question you know you are going to ask is this. This is maximum godliness up here. 'You never sin?' 'Oh, no!' Lordship Salvation people say, 'Of course you sin.' 'Well, then I can drop below the maximum godliness.' 'Yes, you can drop below.' 'Still going?' 'Yes.' I'm going to Heaven.' 'How far? Here?' 'Well, no here.' 'That far down.' But then, here's my good friend Tommy Cross; he's down here. He says, 'No, down here is where it goes.' But, then along comes John Hurt who is a real jet set; he says, 'No down here.' He wants to cover himself. So, how far down do we have to go before we can still fool around and be a little sinful and still be going up here to the Glory land where all the harps are waiting for you? How far can we go down? That's very unclear. And when you talk to Lordship Salvation people and say, 'How much can I get off from the absolute level?', it's very unclear because nobody can define that, because it has nothing to do with salvation in the first place.

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 15 to the story that you are well acquainted with, the story of the prodigal son. Luke 15:11-32, Jesus tells a parable about a man who had 2 sons. He was a very rich man. He had a younger son and an older son. The younger son one day came to his father and asked for his share of the inheritance in advance. The father agreed and gave him his share, his half. A few days later, the younger son gathered up his belongings, took his money, and headed out for a far country where he squandered his inheritance in sinful living with a lot of good time friends.

In time, he had squandered all that his father had given him, and he discovered that he suddenly was in a society that was shot with famine. So, there wasn't a lot of easy handout food. So, he had to hire himself out to a man who raised pigs, and he gave him the job of feeding the swine, in the process of which he was able to fill his own stomach by stealing food from the pigs. Finally, the Bible says this yo-yo comes to his senses. Verse 17, "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!'" He remembers how well everyone back home in his father's house is living, while he, the son of the owner of that farm, is starving. In Verse 18 he makes a decision. "I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.'" He makes the decision to go back home. He's had enough of this pigsty that he's been living in and of the food. He decides to go home, and he makes a plan: he says, "I'm going to go up to my dad and I'm going to confess to him that I have been guilty of a very serious breach of conduct toward him. That was a sinful thing that I did. And I'm going to say to him, 'I recognize that this is indeed an act of sin in the eyes of God, and in the eyes of man.'"

Verse 19, he says, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men." He concludes that he should ask his father simply to hire him on as one of the hired hands. He's not worthy to be treated as the son. And, his point in saying this is that he will work for his father in order to gain acceptance. 'I want to be accepted by you again as your son and I confess to you my sin, and I ask you to hire me as a hired hand so that I may earn your respect and once more become worthy of having you accept and treat me as your son.' So, he gets up and proceeds to make his journey back home.

As he approaches the farm, the father sees him. Verse 20, "And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him." The father immediately demonstrated that he had no such arrangement in mind as His Son had proposed to himself in order to receive this Son back into the family. The father's acceptance was absolutely free. He rushed up, put his arms around the boy, kissed him and rejoiced in the fact that he was back. There was no condition at all. He did not walk up to him. He did not glare at him. He did not look him down. He did not ream him out. He walked up and he embraced, kissed him. So, the father demonstrated immediate compassion for his erring son. And, in the Greek Bible, it tells us that he did this hugging and kissing repeatedly. It was a very emotional scene. This act of unconditional acceptance was done, please notice, before the prodigal son had said a word of his prepared confession to his father.

The prodigal son quickly revises his speech. And in Verse 21, he gives a revised version: "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" He makes no mention of being hired on as a hired hand. Why not? Because he realizes that the father's reception has made that unnecessary. He doesn't need any kind of a plan to gain his father's acceptance. All that's now relevant. Why? Because the father has accepted him. The father has given him forgiveness. The father has given him total acceptance.

So, the father immediately confirms this attitude on his part in verses 22-24. The father confirms his total forgiveness to his son by dressing him in new clothing. He gives them a ring and he orders a party to celebrate his return. Verse 22, "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry." So, what you have here is the whole picture of the father doing something for the son instead of the son coming home to do something for the father. The prodigal son, you see, was still the father's son when he was far off into sin. He had never stopped being the son while he was in the depth of the worst of his sinning.

The party celebrated, thus, the return of the son, not the hiring of a new worker for the farm. Verse 32 says, "But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours [Speaking to the older brother who resented this warm reception of the sinning son, "for this brother of yours] was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found." Do those words indicate that this son was actually dead physically? Obviously, no. It indicates that he was dead in terms of fellowship with the father and with his family. And, when you break fellowship with your heavenly Father, you are in a condition of separation; that is the key word for death. Death always means separation of some kind. Physical death means separation of the soul and spirit from the body. Spiritual death means separation from God. So, here he is saying this son was dead in terms of being alienated from fellowship with the family.

And when he said he was lost, does that mean that they didn't know where he was? It means he knew all the time where he was, but it means that he was out of fellowship with the family again. He was not walking with his father. So, both these terms, dead and lost, indicate separation from fellowship with the father. So, the joy here was over a son who had been separated from the father in sin but has now come back into fellowship with his father, the joy over a lost son who is out of fellowship in a sinful lifestyle, who has now found himself by coming back into fellowship, through repentance and through confession.

Now, that's a very important story in the Bible, because it teaches an enormously important truth that the Lord was trying to get over. Once you're in the family of God, you're in the family of God for keeps, but you can be in somebody's family, including God's, and be a terribly sinful person. And there are some Christians who are so sinful in the family of God that they're jaded to it. They don't even think they're sinful. They don't even think that they're out of fellowship with the Father. They have conned themselves and they have rationalized, and they have adjusted things to justify what they're doing so they don't think they're even out of step with God the Father. Obviously, that's what the son did. When he walked away from home, he wasn't under any sense of guilt. He had fully rationalized to himself that this was OK to do. It was only when the world came falling down around his ears that he said, 'Wait a minute, something is wrong here.' And, as the Bible so aptly says, "He came to his senses."

So, we do have the same case for you and me as Christians in terms of our sin. We who are Christians may also be dead in carnality, we may be lost from temporal fellowship with the Heavenly Father. But when that sinning Christian confesses to the Father, he comes home. He's now spiritually once more alive into the circle of temporal fellowship. He comes back into Temporal Fellowship, but he never left his eternal Father's family relationship. The prodigal son left the inner circle of fellowship with his family and his father, but he never ceased his family relationship. That is the point.

**Heaven Rejoices at a Christian's Restoration**

And Heaven rejoices over his restoration to temporal fellowship with his father. When you and I, as Christians, come back, all of Heaven rejoices. Confession of known sins brings our immediate restoration to the full expression of God's love as you know from 1 John 1:9.

I reiterate to you that the Book of 1 John, you must remember, was written to Christians. The Book of 1 John does not speak to unbelievers. There are whole denominations, and I read an article this week where the writer was using 1 John 1:9 as a verse for salvation, and he was explaining to people how they must confess their sins in order to be saved. That's what you get if you read that verse and think it's talking to non-Christians. 1 John 1:9 is the child in the family of God getting back into good terms with his heavenly Father.

Lordship Salvation implies that the prodigal son's father would not have received him back into fellowship if he had not been willing to serve him. Lordship Salvation teachers say the father would never have taken his son back in, he would never have received him warmly like this, he would never have welcomed him home as a son, if he had not indicated that he was now willing to be obedient to the Father. Get it? You're back to that: I am going to do right; I am going to obey God.

**A Misinterpretation of the Prodigal Son Parable**

In Dr. MacArthur's book, "The Gospel According To Jesus," he says on page 153 in speaking of the parable of the prodigal son, "Here is a perfect illustration of the nature of saving faith. Observe the young man's unqualified compliance, his absolute humility and his unequivocal willingness to do whatever his father asked of him. The prodigal, who began by demanding an early inheritance, was now willing to serve his father as a bond servant. He had made a complete turnaround. His demeanor was one of unconditional surrender, a complete resignation of self and absolute submission to his father. That is the essence of saving faith." Now, I don't know how anybody could read the story of the prodigal son and make a statement like that.

As I have just shown you, the truth of the matter is the boy never got to use his speech. He never got to tell his father his attitude of being willing to be obedient, to be subject to him, to be a hired hand, to gain his restoration in the family by his conduct and performance. The Father didn't find that an issue. His son was out of fellowship, not out of the family.

His son only needed to be brought into terms of close communion once more with the parent and with the family. That was the issue. When he walked home and the father saw him, the very fact that he was coming back was all that the father needed to understand that the boy had changed his mind and his appearance at the farm indicated his confession before he ever opened his mouth. This statement is totally incompatible with the reading of Scripture. This boy did not indicate that he was going to be obedient, behave himself or anything else. That was not the basis upon which the father received him back. This offer of the son was never made to the father who clearly, graciously received his repentant son apart from any promises.

**Interpreting the Prodigal Son Parable**

Dr. Zane Hodges, a great teacher at Dallas Theological Seminary, a gem of a theologian, has written a book called "Absolutely Free." In it, he discusses this parable of the prodigal son. On page 17 of his book, he indicates what the conversation would have had to been like between the father and the prodigal son according to Lordship Salvation. Dr. Hodges says it would have gone like this, "The son - 'Dad, am I really your son or my only adopted?' Father - 'Well, young man, it depends on how you behave. If you really are my son, you will show this by doing the things I tell you to do. If you have my nature inside of you, you can't help but be obedient.' Son - 'But what if I disobey you a lot, Dad?' Father - 'Then you have every reason to doubt that you are truly my son.'" That's where you come to when you say assurance of salvation is dependent on how you behave yourself in the family of God, and if you don't fall too far below the standard of absolute performance. This is what a son would have to say to a father in order to be assured that he really was his son and not adopted. How you act will prove that.

As a matter of fact, how you act in a wrong way will often prove that you are indeed your father's son or your mother's daughter. Haven't you ever heard a wife say, 'This kid never does right, he's just like his father.' It is the evil conduct more than anything else that proves you belong in that family. This girl has this irritating characteristic, she's just like your mother. That's what proves that you were in that family, not the good things, the nice things, the obedient, just the very opposite.

Dr. MacArthur, in his book on page 23, also says, "Professing Christians utterly lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance they are saved." You got it? A person who says, "I'm a Christian, I trust in Christ as Savior," yet there's no evidence of good fruit being produced in the life through service, that person can have no assurance that he is saved [according to MacArthur].

He also makes this quote on the same page, "Genuine assurance comes from seeing the Holy Spirit's transforming work in one's life, not from clinging to the memory of some experience." What's he saying? 'How do I know I'm going to Heaven? Because I see myself doing good works as a Christian, because I see myself doing right, living right as a Christian.' Not, he says, 'Because I look back and there was a point in time when somebody told me the gospel, they explained to me how I could be saved by trusting in Jesus Christ as my Savior. I believed it. I accepted God at His Word and I have trusted myself to His Son.' That's an experience back there. That's what he's talking about. So, [according to MacArthur] you can't look back at some experience like that and say, 'That's how I know I'm going to heaven.' Paul could, but Paul didn't know any better. That's why Paul says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day." What's Paul saying? Paul says, "I know I'm going to Heaven because back there I had an experience where I believed this. I took God at His Word and I trusted myself to His Son. Poor Paul, he never learned any better. He went to his grave thinking that looking back to that experience on the Damascus Road where he believed in Jesus Christ is what got him into Heaven, when he should have been saying [according to MacArthur], I can only know I'm going there because of the way I serve God and how I act. How much fruit? Of true righteousness is enough to confirm your salvation.

You see, the problem here is that the comparison, the antithesis that MacArthur has set up, is wrong. It is not between the memory of some experience when you accepted Christ as Savior to give you a personal assurance of salvation, but it's the antithesis between believing that the Bible is telling you the truth in its offer of free grace salvation through trusting in Christ as Savior and having thereby an assurance of salvation. MacArthur makes the comparison that producing fruit in your life is the basis of assurance. The Bible says, "No, no, that's the wrong antithesis. In the Bible it's trusting Christ at some point as your Savior that gives you assurance of salvation.

You cannot base your salvation upon some experience. I'll tell you, if you do that, you'll be in great sorrow, depression, agony, and in tears sooner or later. If you think that you have to have some kind of experience like maybe somebody else has had, or like you think people should have, the devil is going to get you.

The comparison is God is not a liar. He has told me the truth when He gave me John 3:16. I believe it. Now I know I'm going to Heaven. Assurance of salvation is based on the promise of God in Scripture to save the believing sinner. Assurance of salvation is never based on the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Have you got that? Assurance is never based on the fact that God does indeed transform the life of a believer in his conduct. He does do that. But that's not the basis of your assurance, because in some Christians, the Holy Spirit can't get very far in that transformation. The sanctification is stifled in a lot of people's lives and therefore you would very quickly have doubts about your salvation. Assurance is based upon the fact that God tells us the truth.

The believer who is at peace about his salvation is in fact the one through whom the Holy Spirit can do great, divine good works. You're not always eating your heart out and wondering where you're going to end up if you die and go out of this life.

**The Tragedy of Lacking Assurance**

You see, it as a great tragedy that so many Christians today are so oblivious to the unconditional love of God toward them as their father. They can read a parable like the prodigal son, and they don't make the connection that this is telling you how unconditional is the love of God toward you! God says, “I've covered you. You can do the worst of things, I've covered you. You're going to stay in My family. And will be no evidence of the fact that you have not really accepted My Son as your Savior.” What God does is a way for us to return through our confession. Lordship Salvation, you see, really undermines a believer's joy in his place in God's family because it makes it so dependent upon your performance in daily life.

You know what you're going to do. When you get to that state, then you're going to try to be as legalistic in doing what is good and what is right, you're going to find all the good things you can do to keep reassuring yourself that you're on your way to Heaven. Lordship Salvation pushes people to the preoccupation with keeping a code of rules like the Mosaic Law to prove that they have saving faith. The keeping of the law, as a matter of fact, prevents a person from being saved. The keeping of the Mosaic Law keeps you from growing in godliness. God says, 'You are saved through an act of God, not through an act of your own where you keep rules. You grow in the spiritual life through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, through the doctrine you've been taught, not by the fact that you keep certain rules.'

**Who Lives Good Enough to Prove They Are Going to Heaven?**

So, who of us, as true believers in Christ, lives a life good enough to deserve heaven? Who of us lives a life good enough to prove that we are going to Heaven? That's so nonsensical, it is such an insult to the grace of God, and it is very sad. There are many people indeed in local churches who are not saved. They have a false hope when they think that they are going to Heaven. There are people in local churches who are not saved. We will admit that. But that is due to the failure to know the true gospel and what to do with it, or it is being negative toward the gospel and pretending to believe it.

**Correcting False Professions**

To answer that problem of people having a false profession, you don't change the gospel. What you do is make it clear to people what the basis of salvation is, that it's what Christ has done that counts and not what they do that counts. You don't go changing the message of free grace salvation, which is what Lordship Salvation teachers want to do, in order to get people to do right. There is a grand simplicity about the Biblical doctrine of Free Grace Salvation, which no one has the right to contaminate with performance confirmation. God's grace salvation is so clear no one has the right to try to contaminate it with a performance requirement.

**Repentance - Establishing Harmony Between a Sinner and a Holy God**

Lordship Salvation says, 'You don't get into Heaven until you first commit an act of repentance.' So, we're going to have to look at the subject of repentance. The Greek word for repentance, the noun, is "metanoia" m e t n o i a, looks like that. This word originally meant "to change your mind about something." In the New Testament, this word means "to turn away from something." That turning away may be motivated by remorse or by disgust, but that's not part of this word; it's just turning away from something. In the New Testament, the word repentance is associated with turning away from sin to God in order to establish harmony with Him.

The verb has the same idea. The Greek word is "metanoeo," m e t a n o e o. This literally means "to perceive something afterwards and then to take actions accordingly," you realize something after the fact and then you take action. What it connotes is a deliberate turning away from something, again, the idea of a change of mind. It may be motivated by remorse or by disgust.

**The Biblical Meaning of Repentance**

The basic meaning of this word, (And here you've got them both, the noun/the verb. Every time the Bible talks about repent or repentance, this is the word you're going to come up against.) this word has one basic meaning, and that is "to establish harmony between 2 elements, 2 individuals." In the Bible, this word is used to mean "to establish harmony between a sinner and a holy God." If you understand that, you will not be tricked into misunderstanding repentance as it is connected to salvation. Repentance means to establish harmony between the sinner and a holy God.

**Establishing Harmony With God**

So, harmony with God is first established by faith in Christ as one's Savior; that protects him from eternal death in the Lake of Fire. This is the relationship of the outer circle of eternal fellowship with God. Then harmony with God is established in temporal fellowship. That is maintained by repentance, changing your mind about your sin, expressing that in confession to the Father all of the known mental and overt acts of evil.

Let's bring this together: repentance and saving faith. In the Bible, repentance is never made a condition for personal salvation. In the Bible, being saved is never structured upon repentance. You remember I told you that the gospel of John was very explicit in declaring why it was written. In John 20:30 and 31, the apostle John says this about his book, "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

So, John's stated purpose here in these verses is evangelism. And not once throughout all the 21 chapters of his gospel, not once does he speak of repentance. Isn't that interesting? He says in chapter 20, verses 30 and 31, 'I've written this book to tell you how to go to Heaven.' Lordship Salvation says, 'The first step to Heaven is repentance as an expression that you're going to make Christ Lord of your life and be obedient to Him, and then you trust Him for salvation.' Yet John, who tells us he's going to write a book about how to go to Heaven, never once referred to repentance, let alone to associate it with saving faith.

Dr. John MacArthur in his book "The Gospel According To Jesus" on page 167 says, "No evangelism that omits the message of repentance can properly be called the gospel; for sinners cannot come to Jesus Christ apart from a radical change of heart, mind, and will that demands a spiritual crisis leading to a complete turnaround and ultimately a wholesale transformation. It is the only kind of conversion Scripture recognizes." That is very, very confused instruction. He has said in effect, that John did not achieve his purpose. John under the guidance of the Holy Spirit said 'I've written this gospel. And in it I have explained to you how to go to Heaven.' Lordship Salvation teachers say 'You have failed completely John! The Holy Spirit did not do the job with you because you did not associate repentance with being saved. Not once!'

Now, you yourself can confirm this. Get yourself a concordance. Look up under the word repentance, all the variations of the word repentance, and just run your eye through the Gospel section, and you will notice you have it in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, totally absent every time. Not once does this word occur. So, it is quite clear that the Holy Spirit, in guiding John to make an accurate presentation to us of how to go to Heaven, never once made repentance by the lost sinner a requirement for salvation.

Salvation in the Bible is Free Grace Salvation, and for that reason it is based on faith alone. The Protestant reformers knew this. They came to this conclusion early on. They make no mistake about that. And the way they expressed this was with the Latin words "sola fide." Sola Fide means "faith alone." They would constantly refer to salvation as Sola Fide. By these words, they meant that 'faith in Jesus Christ is the sole condition for justification which would entitle one to eternal life in Heaven.'

Here's what Martin Luther had to say. Martin Luther, in trying to explain Sola Fide salvation, did it in this way. He said, "Faith holds out the hand and the sack and just lets the good be done to it, for as God is the giver who bestows such things in His love, we are the receivers who receive the gift through faith which does nothing. For it is not our doing and cannot be merited by our faith. It has already been granted and given. You need only open your mouth, or rather your heart, and keep still, and let yourself be filled." So, Martin Luther's picture was 'holding a sack, and God dumping salvation into it.' You hold up the sack, He'll put the salvation into it, you can take it home. All you have to do is receive the offer. It is Sola Fide, nothing apart from your acceptance.

Salvation, thus, was clearly viewed by the reformers as a free grace gift from God apart from any human works to earn it or to deserve it. The act of human repentance is not included by the Protestant reformers at any time in their explanations of salvation.

One of the great verses that demonstrates this principle of faith alone, the Sola Fide for salvation, is Acts 16:31. You're well acquainted with it. On this occasion, when the Philippian jailer finally realized his condition and his need, he asked, 'What can I do to be saved? What was the response of the great apostle Paul who certainly should know how to tell you what to do to be saved? "And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, you and anybody in your household who believes.'" This is an expression, a classic expression of faith alone salvation; there's no requirement made here for repentance along with faith to be saved. The answer to the inquiry of the Philippian jailer was not believe plus repent, it was not believe plus water baptism, plus good works, plus church membership, plus surrender, plus sacraments, plus anything else.

You may say, well, that's silly. Of course, people aren't going to do that. Hey, I picked up a track one-time years ago and it was titled 15 Steps to Salvation; and they included everything under the sun they could think of, not just the big stuff like repentance and confession and all that. I mean, they had love your mother-in-law more, and put a candle in the window for your erring child, and everything under the sun that they could possibly think would cover them. They took no chances, 15 steps to get you into Heaven. That's Lordship Salvation folks, in one of its grossest kinds of expression.

Lordship Salvation teachers answer this verse in this way, they say 'Yes. But you see, it has the word Lord, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul implies that you must commit yourself to a life of obedience in order to be saved, as well as to faith in Christ.

Trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, however, does not mean that one necessarily obeys Him as Lord in the Christian life. What the word "Lord" in this verse connotes is His deity and that He is the one of supreme authority. They are telling this jailer that we're asking you not to commit yourself to Lord Caesar (He understood what Lord Caesar meant because Caesar claimed to be God.), he says, 'We're not asking you to commit yourself to that authority, we're asking you to commit yourself to the creator authority, the Lord Jesus Christ, not just some passing itinerant preacher. This person has the capacity to take you into Heaven.' That's why the word Lord was used there. And to impose upon it the idea that that meant to behave yourself is simply reading into that word what is not there. The jailer was being told that the person he was told to trust for salvation, had the power to save him and his family.

As a matter of fact, you can't make Christ Lord. In Acts 2:36 and in Acts 10:36, Luke says that Jesus Christ is Lord, both of the living and the dead, both of the save and the unsaved. He already is Lord. It is a false illusion that unsaved people can offer submission to the will of God before they're saved. Only a born-again person can really be obedient to Jesus Christ. The unsaved person can make no real honest commitment along that line.

The Lordship of Jesus Christ is indeed to be taught to Christians. We do not take issue with the fact that Christians should do right. We do not take issue with the fact that Christians must be taught what is the will of God. And at the end of Matthew in that great commission passage that was made very clear that once a person is saved, then you teach him how to behave himself as a Christian. Matthew 28:19-20 say, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations [That is, get them saved.], baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [Then having brought them into the Christian life, what do you do?] teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Yes, there is a place for making Christ Lord, but it comes after you're saved, and it has nothing to do with salvation. Yes, it is important that people be taught the Word of God. This is why the kind of ministry you have at Berean Church is so crucial.

I listened to a segment of the Donahue program this week. On it, he had an Episcopalian homosexual priest who is creating quite a furor in the east with his bishop. Eventually, somebody in the audience brought up the fact, as he sat with his clerical turned around collar, that what he was teaching people was contrary to Scripture. He had said, the only way you can be unfaithful in marriage is if you and your wife, when you came to be married, agreed to have an exclusive relationship. If you agree to have an open marriage, then you are never unfaithful. One lady finally brought up the fact that the Bible condemns homosexuality. Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of it. He says, "Oh, no, that's just an example. What Sodom and Gomorrah was teaching was the sin of not taking care of people's needs."

Another lady said, "What about the Ten Commandments?" And when she said that, Donahue did what he always does, he zipped the microphone to the next person. Any time somebody refers to moral codes or to the Bible, it makes him very uncomfortable. That audience was not sympathetic. A few more people went by. Another lady stood up and says, "I want to get back to that question about the Ten Commandments." I could see that Donahue cringed. [The lady continuing.] "This question, it condemns what you are recommending. Are you going to rewrite the Ten Commandments? Are you going to rewrite God's moral code in the Bible?" At that point, the Episcopalian priest exploded. I mean, he lost his cool. He said, "I don't care what the Bible teaches! I don't want to talk about the Bible anymore! The Bible is not an issue! I don't want to even have you, don't ask me anything about that!" And that took Donohue back. He felt he had to defend the lady. He said, "Well, you don't have to talk about it, but we can talk about it."

The whole picture was "What does the Bible have to say about how I should live as a Christian?" Well, it has everything to say about it? "What does the Bible have to do with how I can live?" This was a godless, immoral man who in all probability is headed for the Lake of Fire, yet who is counseling people on marriage, who is performing religious ceremonies of his church, who is up there accepted by the fact that somebody ordained him as a homosexual to the priesthood, and he had his boyfriend right there with him? You wonder what God must have thought looking down on that program.

Yes, Christ must be Lord. He obviously was not the Lord in that priest's life, he obviously was not the one to whom he was subjecting himself according to what that Lord had taught us in Scripture. Lordship Salvation is a bummer deal. It is creating great agonies among many Christians and causing them to wonder if they're really going to Heaven because they're placing their confidence on the wrong thing, on something that they are trying to do, that they are promising to do, instead of on something that Christ has done and who alone can do for them to cover their sin.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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