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“I Am a Christian”: True or False?

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Faithful Men

PlymouthBrethren.org · KEE Philippine Missions

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“The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

Introduction

As a child I wondered about God. What did God expect of me? For what purpose was I put here on earth? Where could I find the answers? Those questions may seem surprising from a child who was baptized and confirmed, a church member and regular Sunday school attender. I learned Bible stories, Bible verses and statements from church creeds. Somehow this material never came together in my mind in an understandable way. Perhaps that was my fault. I suspect, however, that my teachers lacked the ability to communicate clearly the essential teaching necessary for my soul's eternal welfare. I needed to know the answers to my questions. Somehow my church failed me.

This book has been written to give some answers to essential questions about our relationship to God. Everyone ought to learn the answers to these questions from the only reliable source, God Himself. These answers came by special revelation through the Bible. From the Bible we learn what we could not otherwise know about God and His interactions with people.

Each chapter in this small book addresses a major spiritual issue that is often unclear and confused in the minds of the general public. This confusion also exists, regrettably, in the minds of many church attenders, including some in Bible-teaching churches. Our Bible teachers, taken as a whole but with some exceptions, are not doing a careful job of clarifying vital spiritual truths. Each chapter deserves thoughtful, prayerful consideration. Whether or not you agree with every statement in the chapter, you ought to think about these

issues and come to a clear, Biblical conviction about them. May the Holy Spirit guide you in this study because all of us need to be sure of our salvation. Remember this: You yourself must answer before God the question, “Am I a true, born again Christian?” Your answer must be based on Biblical facts, not human hopes. It will determine your eternal destiny. Think this through carefully.

Lesson 1: Are There Few That Be Saved?

Will only a few people go to Heaven when they die? The Scriptural answer to that profound question is “yes.” Despite the loving intentions of our God (John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4) most souls will not go there. When the disciples asked the Lord, “Are there few that be saved?” (Luke 13:23), He answered their question plainly. “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Most people either do not know this or, for whatever reason, reject His teaching. Millions of people say, “I am a Christian,” but with little or no evidence that their claim is in agreement with the Bible. Funeral services regularly reassure the audience that the deceased person is in Heaven. Is this always true or just wishful thinking?

A tragedy today is that most people confidently expect to go to Heaven, however questionable their spiritual condition. Some persons may seldom read the Bible or know its teaching about salvation. Yet multitudes remain mysteriously, irrationally confident of going to Heaven. The general reasoning seems to be “God is simply too loving to send me to Hell.” Many think that because they belong to a good church, or any church, they will make it to Heaven. It may be they are not regularly, or even occasionally, attending, but they think this neglect makes no difference. They may feel, “I’m basically a good person,” or at least, “I’m not a bad person.” Therefore, “God will accept me as good enough for Heaven.” Is this true? On the contrary the Bible tells us that “none is righteous” in the sight of an infinite holy God (Romans 3:10). Some persons may seldom read the

Bible or know its teaching about salvation. Still multitudes remain mysteriously, irrationally confident of going to Heaven.

What is the situation in the world regarding the number of those who identify themselves as Christians? In 1980 E.R. Dayton in his book, *To Reach the Unreached*, estimated there were about one billion “Christians” out of a world population of four billion—roughly 25%. In 1998 the world population was estimated at six billion. Here the number of “Christians” was estimated at 1.5 to 1.8 billion, about the same percentage and still a minority. The term “Christian” includes every variety of belief, including cults with serious contradictions concerning major doctrines. It also includes all baptized persons who long ago may have stopped attending church. Many churches use “godparents” (those who supposedly vow to see the children raised as Christians) to “believe” on behalf of infants or small children when they are baptized. This is done usually by sprinkling and marking their foreheads with the sign of the cross. Later, candidates go to catechism classes, largely consisting of memory work (creeds, verses of Scripture such as the Ten Commandments, etc.), and it is assumed they understand and believe all they were taught or memorized. Then they become members and can “take communion” after a “confirmation service” presided over by a bishop. Of course none of this, other than baptism, is mentioned in Scripture; nor was it practiced by the Apostolic church of the first century. The qualification for baptism is genuine saving faith (Acts 8:36-37). The blood of Christ alone removes sins, not the waters of baptism (Revelation 1:5; Hebrews 9:22), or any church ritual.

Evangelical churches believe that by the preaching of the gospel hearers will obey the gospel message and thus be saved (1 Peter 4:17; Acts 5:32). Although exact figures are difficult to determine, it is estimated that only 300 to 350 million believers belong to evangelical gospel-preaching churches. That is about 25% of those in the world who say they are Christians. Of this number, only the most optimistic person would believe that every one of them is truly a born-again believer, showing at least minimal signs of new life in Christ. Out of a world population of six billion, even 300 million people are certainly few in number. How do they become Christians according to general practice? Most evangelical church members are baptized and hold church membership. There is the widespread belief that this is all that is required. Genuine saving faith is assumed. Some so-called “Christians” base their hope of Heaven on baptism and church membership. Churches are reluctant to remove lapsed attenders from membership. Today, virtually no one is excommunicated for sinful behavior, despite the command to do so in 1 Corinthians 5.

Evangelists sometimes hold a period of consecutive evangelistic meetings or “revivals,” as they are called in some parts. I recall one evangelistic revival incident. It involved an elderly widow who certainly was living a Christian life and attended one of these meetings. The preacher typically used a multiple appeal at the end of his message. He first asked those who wanted to be saved to come forward. There was almost no response. The evangelist continued his appeal: “Those who want to be restored to the Lord, come forward.” Then he appealed, “Those who want to rededicate their lives to the Lord, come forward.” Finally, because the response was so

poor, he desperately appealed, “Those of you who are not doing as much for the Lord as you should, come forward.” That appeal touched the elderly widow. She came forward to sit on the front seat as an “inquirer.” The pastor was the one who first spoke to her. “Tell me, why did you come forward?” She replied in a quavering voice, “I don’t think I’m doing as much for the Lord as I should.” The pastor rose and said, “And who is?” Then he walked away with a despairing sigh.

An internationally known evangelist told me he is judged by his success in bringing people forward personally. He said, “I hate it.” I asked, “Why then did you prolong your meetings at the end with these appeals?” He answered, “It is necessary to get results. That means numbers.” In my experience, there are very few such “converts” who prove to be real. I have counseled many times in the “crusades” of the most famous mass evangelist in the world. When I questioned those who came forward, few had any real conviction of sin or true understanding of the gospel. When asked, “Why did you come forward?,” they often replied, “It seemed like a good thing to do. It couldn’t hurt.” I would estimate that a surprisingly small minority of such persons were truly saved, based on referrals to my church and other churches. Still, multitudes base their hope of Heaven on this “decision” experience. A “decision” indicates almost any response to a gospel presentation such as indicated below:

I went forward to the front of a meeting.

I raised my hand after a message.

I said “Amen” to someone’s prayer, or repeated a formula prayer.

I accepted God's free gift of salvation.

I signed a decision card.

I asked Jesus into my heart.

Are such responses taught in the Book of Romans or the Gospel of John? What is the content of the faith of people taking such steps? Is there true "heart" understanding? Consider what often happens after this kind of profession. A worker may introduce this person to another and say, "John just got saved. Praise the Lord." Or the person may be introduced publicly as "saved." But I question, "how could the worker be absolutely sure of that without an advance copy of the Lamb's book of life?" Rather, it is the responsibility of the professed convert to give his or her own confession of faith (Romans 10:7-10). It should be the Word of God (not the worker) who should provide a proper basis for the assurance of salvation. Who is qualified to give another person their assurance of salvation?

In such evangelistic practices, seeds are planted for what could be a false profession of faith. A person may appear to accept or believe in Christ as Savior, but if afterward this person is encouraged to believe that he or she is sure of going to Heaven mainly because of that profession, no matter how they live later here on earth, it is dangerous. This is called the "eternal security of the profession," rather than the "eternal security of genuine salvation." There is no Scripture to support the "eternal security of a profession." In fact, Scripture warns against "vain words" as a delusion (Ephesians 5:6). Praying "the sinner's prayer" is no guarantee of salvation.

It is remarkable that today there seems to be little or no concern in churches, or by their leaders, or among family members, about the reality of such a supposed relationship to Christ. In many instances there are extended periods of relationship to a particular church by reason of family, friends or ethnic ties. This does not equate to salvation. In prior generations, there was a deep concern about being sure of going to Heaven. There appears to have been a greater fear of God, which is “the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). This helped break traditional ties. Today false profession has become a “lost doctrine of the church” in teaching, counseling and full length books about salvation. It is a dangerous loss. There is absolutely nothing worse than to die, face God and shockingly find you are not going to Heaven to be with the Lord forever as you had hoped (see Matthew 7:22-23). It is tragic to wonder why your friends, your pastors or teachers or your own family allowed you to drift through life while you were deluded with false assurance.

Are you certain that you are among “the few” of whom Jesus spoke, whose names are “written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 20:15)? If not, you need to make sure. Study carefully, not selectively, what the Bible says, about how to be saved, giving careful consideration to each applicable verse of Scripture.

Lesson 1: Are There Few That Be Saved?

1. Do you think most people professing to be Christians would be surprised to know that Jesus said only a few will reach Heaven by the narrow way that leads to life eternal? Why would anyone question this statement?

2. Why do you think most people are more confident of going to Heaven today than people were 50 to 75 years ago? Previously, most people thought no one could be certain of this until the day of final judgment after death.
3. What seems to be the basis of the confidence of most people claiming to be Christians? Why are they so sure of going to Heaven (Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 13:23-27)? Consider common church practices, rituals or “sacraments” as the basis of hope of some.
4. What may be misleading about current church practices by which many are confident they became Christians? List some methods you might question and say why.

Lesson 2: Is False Profession Possible?

The title of this chapter inherently has its own answer. The subject spells great danger, that of self-delusion to the soul, eternal in its consequences. The Biblical teaching of false profession is not frequently taught in churches. Why is it ignored or neglected? There are several possible reasons that churchgoers and others are not alerted:

1. The subject of making a false profession seems negative, alarming and unwelcome. It is like the doctrine of Hell. If people don't want to hear it, then some Christian leaders don't want to teach it. The same could be said for those attributes of God we might not appreciate, such as His wrath, or jealousy, even His holiness. Will ignoring them change the truth?
2. Mass evangelism, "crusades" or even gospel messages and tracts are usually judged by the numbers who respond. Official spokesmen give out statistics. Preachers prolong their appeals. Response is easier if the appeal is simplified. "Come to Jesus, that's all you need" is a typical plea. Unpleasant aspects are minimized such as sin, the need for repentance and eternal punishment for rejecters. After a response or decision there is often little personal interaction to determine the responder's real spiritual condition. Such interaction could reveal minimal, if any, conviction of sin or deep desire to follow the Lord. Everything is designed to make it all as painless as possible. That approach to evangelism is called "easy believism." Is this the way the Lord Jesus, or the apostles,

or the prophets preached? Why do we not preach as they did? Why “sugar-coat” the message?

3. Much evangelism today neglects important issues that should be covered. Questions like “who is Jesus?” are not asked. Many workers do not do a thorough job of dealing with inquirers. They are in too big a hurry, anxious to net a prospect as one would catch fish. It is like a doctor making a superficial examination and saying casually, “you are fine.” Would this be assuring in a medical setting?

False profession puts souls in terrible danger. Note the following verses, viewed from differing perspectives:

1. The children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were called “chosen people”(Deuteronomy 7:6; Isaiah 44:1). They were chosen to fulfill God’s purposes. In that they failed. Being chosen was not equivalent to salvation, although they were very confident of their relationship to God (Romans 2:17-29; 3:9). In fact, many were not saved since they were disobedient to God, although trusting in their ritual and ceremony. They felt superior to the Gentiles. Even Judas Iscariot was “chosen” but, according to the Lord, was a “devil” (John 6:70). He was not saved. Warnings of false hopes were often given by the Lord. Here are some verses to consider:

Matthew 7:21-23—Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, and cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name?” And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. His listeners had every expectation of entering Heaven and some

of them may have had impressive religious credentials. Nevertheless, in the day of judgment the Lord said He would turn them away.

Matthew 13:38—*The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.* Both good seed and bad seed grow beside one another. This speaks of both saved and unsaved people, including “church members” gathered together in meetings. Sometimes it is difficult to tell them apart until the harvest (Matthew 13:30).

Matthew 13:47-50—The kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Here are both tares and bad fish, signifying the unsaved among those professing to be in the kingdom.

2. Many verses show misplaced confidence based on association with the Lord and His people. Such people will be amazed they are refused entry. Here are some examples from Scripture.

Luke 13:23-27—Then one said to Him, Lord are there few who are saved? And He said to them, strive to enter through the narrow gate for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us, and He will answer and say to you, I do not know you, where you are from, then you will begin to say, We ate and drank in Your presence, and

You taught in our streets. But He will say, I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.

Jude 4,12-13,19—For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men ... These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves; they are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever... These are sensual persons causing divisions, not having the Spirit. Ungodly people can have positions of leadership among Christians but will not have the seal of the indwelling Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

I have fellowshiped and preached alongside some who have long since departed from the faith. Some did not “abide in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9; 2 Peter 2:1). Others left wives and children to live immorally the rest of their lives, breaking all contact with God’s people. To my knowledge they never repented. Therefore, I question whether their profession of faith was ever true. They did not lose their salvation. They never had it, despite any appearance to the contrary. I say this on the basis of such verses as those above, rather than my subjective opinion. It indeed causes me great pain.

3. Other Bible verses call upon professing believers to examine the reality of their profession of faith in Christ. Obviously it is wise to do this. Consider these verses:

2 Corinthians 13:5—Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that

Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you are disqualified.

2 Peter 1:10—Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure for if you do these things you will never stumble.

4. Some Bible verses call special attention to contradictions between a person's behavior and his profession of faith in Christ. Such contradictions evidence the falseness of an individual's profession.

1 John 2:4—He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in Him. Ask yourself, “Who is a liar here?”

James 2:14—What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him? Such a man's “faith” is not a saving faith.

1 John 2:19—They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Before John wrote the above letter, the Lord had illustrated this truth with the story of the wise man who built his house on a rock and the fool who built his house on the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). The fool is one who “hears these words of Mine, and does not do them.” Habitual hearing without obedience to the Lord marks a false profession. Such a profession is fruitless because it is not accompanied by obedience. We are warned that “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). The way that “seems right” may be wrong and lead you to Hell.

The Lord Jesus taught people that they ought to be terrified of even the possibility of Hell (Luke 12:4-5).

“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire,” said the Lord. “Therefore, by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:19-20). This passage opens with a warning about a spiritual way of life which is narrow and only a few find it (v 14). Scripture frequently mentions false religions, false prophets, false apostles, false teachers and false brethren. *False* here means not truly of God. Throughout Biblical history many wicked kings, false religious leaders and deceived people considered themselves believers. Though Judas Iscariot was a companion of the Lord Jesus, he was “the son of perdition,” not a child of God. The people of Israel were set apart for God’s purpose that they might be a “light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6). Regrettably, they failed in this mission and degenerated into wickedness (Jeremiah 2:21-22). Their condition became so bad that the Lord said of the people, “Everyone of them is godless and an evildoer” (Isaiah 9:17). In His time here on earth, the Lord said to the religious leaders, “You are of your father the Devil and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44). Those “sons of the kingdom” would be “cast out into the outer darkness” in the final judgment (Matthew 8:12).

How could we doubt, in the light of such verses quoted above, that the Bible teaches many who think of themselves as believers are absolutely deceived? In many instances their profession of faith, or claim to be followers of the Lord, is evidently untrue according to Scripture. False profession definitely is a Biblical teaching. Many church members or baptized people should be warned of their unjustified

complacency. “Let no man deceive you with empty words” (Ephesians 5:6).

The following chapter will outline explicitly what the Bible teaches concerning how to be saved. Read it carefully, with Bible in hand.

Study Guide Lesson 2: Is False Profession Possible?

1. What might make you question the truth of the claim by some, “I am a Christian”? Why?
2. What made the Lord Jesus challenge many from among “the chosen people” (the Jews) as to whether they would “enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 7:21-23; 13:38,47-50)? Why were they so confident and how does this apply to church members today?
3. If you were to examine yourself concerning your profession of faith in Christ, what might you discover (2 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10)?
4. What are some contradictions between false profession and genuine saving faith indicated in 1 John 2:4; James 2:14; 1 John 2:19?

Lesson 3: What Must I Do To Be Saved?

The title of this chapter asks a good question. It was originally asked by a jailer at Philippi (Acts 16:30). Every professing Christian ought to be able to answer it clearly and concisely, but many cannot; and it raises doubts as to whether they will be in Heaven. Some respond by saying, “We must believe in God”; but even the demons do that (James 2:19). Some say, “Believe in Jesus,” but what are we to believe about Jesus? Some say, “Ask Jesus into your heart and you will be saved,” but no verse clearly teaches this, not even Revelation 3:20. The books of Romans and John, which are premier expositions on how to be saved, do not teach this.

We must begin with Christ as the foundation. His death and resurrection are essential elements of the gospel. The verses of Scripture that clearly teach the content of the gospel are found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. By hearing and believing this gospel we are saved and sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). Thus we enter into a saving, personal relationship with God through Christ.

Let us briefly review the truth that leads us to salvation and how we need to respond:

1. We must realize that God does love us and gave His only begotten Son for us. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Do you realize the price God paid to show His love for you?
2. We must realize that the human problem is sin, which prohibits fellowship with a Holy God. “For all have sinned

and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “Your iniquities have separated you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). These words refer to our personal sins. Have you been convicted of them and been deeply concerned (Acts 2:37)? If you do not sense a need for His forgiveness, why would you come to the sinner’s Savior?

3. Sin has a penalty, a necessary punishment, which can be paid in only one way. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20). Death is the only payment for sin accepted by God. Your sins are not forgiven just by asking for forgiveness, as so many believe. There is a penalty that must be paid. It calls for death, otherwise known as capital punishment. You may pay it, or another may pay it for you.
4. The penalty includes not only physical death but spiritual death, which is separation from God forever. “Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death and anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14-15). Do you fear this (Matthew 10:28)? If not, why not?
5. Because God loved us, He sent the Lord Jesus to die in our place as a substitute to pay the penalty of death for us. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Do you realize that God took your place, was your substitute, to pay for your sins? It was the only way to save your soul. “He loved us and washed us from our sins in His own

- blood” (Revelation 1:5). Without this act of mercy we would all die in our sins (John 8:24).
6. You cannot pay for your sins or earn your way to Heaven by simply trying to be a good person. Good deeds are the fruit of a transformed life, not a way of earning salvation. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10). No person can claim to be righteous or good enough to be admitted to Heaven (Romans 3:10-12). Do you think you are an exception to this?
7. Although Christ has made our forgiveness possible by His sacrifice, we must respond to God in order to receive His salvation. True faith includes both repentance and yieldedness to God. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a turning to God’s right ways. Repentance is essential to be right with God. “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). What is repentance? It is a change of mind which will result in a change of life. “Let the wicked *forsake his way* and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him” (Isaiah 55:7). “Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21) are companion truths, not to be separated.
8. You must receive Jesus Christ (the Messiah) as Lord and Savior. “As many as *received Him* [the Lord Jesus Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to

those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). “He who *has the Son* has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). “If you *confess* with your mouth the Lord Jesus [or Jesus as Lord], *and believe in your heart* that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). A marriage ceremony is an illustration of receiving Christ as your Lord and Savior (Romans 7:4; Ephesians 5:22-30). Two people mutually receive one another and commit themselves to a faithful relationship. So it is with receiving Christ.

Faith is the channel or condition of salvation. How does this faith become effectual? It requires more than saying a certain prayer, or asking forgiveness, or raising your hand, or mental agreement with Bible facts. It is something that involves mind, will and emotions (your total being) in a decisive, sincere, life-changing act. It is a personal, transforming entrance into a new life with the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are the steps stated in varied Scriptures:

—You hear the gospel message, believe it (depend, trust, rely on its truth) and God gives you the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

—You understand and are convinced that Jesus paid for your sins by His death on the cross, rose from the dead and is alive today to call you to Himself (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

—You abandon hope that your own “goodness,” or trying to keep the Ten Commandments, can put you into favor with God (Romans 4:4-5; Galatians 2:16). Thus you will not fall under a curse for trying to make yourself acceptable to God by your own efforts (Galatians 3:10). Christ alone is able to cleanse you. Salvation is the undeserved favor of God to sinners (Ephesians

2:8-9). We are unworthy of God's acceptance and cannot earn His salvation.

—You enter the Door of eternal life which is Christ Himself (John 10:9), not by looking to the church, rituals or good deeds to open the way.

—You bow the knee to Jesus as Lord and Savior, without knowing all this may mean in the future, just as everyone must do eventually, including the doomed and damned (Philippians 2:10-11). You must be prepared to confess Jesus as Lord before others (Romans 10:9).

—You are born into a new spiritual life through the entrance of the Holy Spirit into your life (John 3:6-7). The Spirit is the one who enables you to live a changed life through God's power. You become a new creation. Old things pass away (2 Corinthians 5:17). You have passed from death to life (John 5:24), from darkness to light (1 Peter 2:9; Colossians 1:13). You are not yet perfect in life on earth, but you begin a new life that will gradually change as you let Christ control your life and mold your character.

—You recognize that Christ has saved you for a purpose, that of living a life of following Him on earth. He is not just handing you a ticket to Heaven and then leaving you free to live as you please here. Jesus is now the Lord, not you. He is your new owner (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Review the following questions and think carefully about them.

1. Have you sensed your spiritual need, neglect of God and disobedience to Him? Do you want to take action? Many times people simply want to escape from current problems

but they do not see their central problem, which is sin. They do not sense any need for God's forgiveness.

2. Do you appreciate His great love for you in sending His beloved Son to this earth to save you, both for this life and the life to come? Are you grateful? The Lord said that the one who senses he or she is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47). Too few of those who make professions truly love the Lord for what He has done for them.
3. Do you want to be fully reconciled to God *and follow* the Lord Jesus rather than your own plans and devices? Do you want His way of life? Salvation is much more than a ticket to Heaven. It is a coming together with Him, a union of life, affecting the way you live day by day. Are you *willing* to turn from what you know to be wrong and submit to Jesus as both your Lord and Savior? It may seem impossible to do but you are not asked to make a promise or vow. You are asked to indicate your sincere intention. His power will enable you to live this new life. Are you ready to do this?
4. Have you sincerely and *without mental reservations*, in humility and brokenness, cried out to the Lord Jesus to save you and take over your life? Are you holding on to any area which He should control? Commitment to Christ is more than a promise to "try to do better."

If you have done this in all sincerity, then *hear* these words:

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13)

The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out (John 6:37)

He who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me, has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment but has passed from death into life (John 5:24).

These things have I written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Consider the word *know*. It is not just think, hope or imagine. Know means to know with certainty.

I have dealt with many people on the subject of salvation. God has graciously given me the privilege of leading a number to Christ. Their lives thereafter *proved* the sincerity of their commitment. On the other hand, despite great care on my part, I have prayed with more than a few who obviously made false professions. They were a grief to me. I asked myself, “What could I have done better?” I have concluded that generally the fault was not mine. They often begged to pray or to decide immediately, even when I suggested they take a while to consider it carefully. What went wrong? Ultimately, they lied to the Holy Spirit and perjured themselves before God. They may have “believed” in some sense but it was not a belief that included repentance and yieldedness to Christ as Lord. They did not claim the provision of Christ as their only hope for salvation. Let us hope when you pray with people who say they want to be saved that they will have understanding and sincerity in their hearts. Then they will be prepared to meet their God (Amos 4:12).

Study Guide Lesson 3: What Must I Do To Be Saved?

1. If someone asked you, “What must I do to be saved?” or “How can I be sure of going to Heaven?” how would you

answer? Briefly write the major steps you would outline and the Scriptures you would have them read after each point.

2. What, in your opinion, are the chief hindrances to understanding the way of salvation, especially to those who believe (falsely) that they are Christians? List at least three possible areas of confusion or misunderstanding.
3. List at least three questions you might ask to test the understanding and commitment of those professing to be Christians?
4. Write briefly at least one experience in which you sought either to lead someone to Christ or to challenge what you suspect may be a false assurance. What was the key issue or issues?

Lesson 4: What Is Saving Faith?

Without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6)

The Scripture does not say it is difficult to please God without faith. It clearly says it is impossible. Faith is the key word in determining our relationship with God. It is God's chosen means whereby we obtain forgiveness of sins and enter into eternal life. It is the channel that connects a sinful person with a holy God through the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. Again and again the Bible states we are saved through faith. Faith is so basic that those who are the children of God are called believers (those with saving faith) and those who do not belong to God are called unbelievers (those without this faith).

What is the nature of saving faith? How is it to be exercised? What does this involve? What is the difference between true faith and a professed faith that is not real in the eyes of God? Many people seem to “believe in believing.” They say we must believe but they have a wide difference of opinion as to what it is they believe.

A humorous story may illustrate this. A young boy was being baptized through immersion by a group that believed in triune baptism. That is, they dipped the candidate three times. The baptizing pastor asked the boy, “Do you believe?” and he answered, “I believe.” Then he was immersed and held under for quite a while. When he came up for air, he was asked again, “Do you believe?” and he replied, “I believe.” He was immersed and held under for a longer time. He emerged, struggling and gasping. For the third time he was asked, “Do you believe?” This time he exploded, “I believe you are trying to drown me.”

That reply was not too far removed from the kind of confused and vague belief many people have about water baptism. There needs to be a better understanding of saving faith than that.

Examples of Faith

The Old Testament gives several examples of faith. The most significant one speaks of Abraham's faith, since he is cited in Romans 4 as the pattern of saving faith. Genesis 15:6 says, "He believed in the Lord and He accounted it to him as righteousness." What did Abraham believe? He believed God's promise that he would have a son, though he was an old man. He believed that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. He had first showed belief in God when he obeyed His command to leave Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 12:1-4). He likewise believed God when he obeyed Him in offering up Isaac (Genesis 22). Abraham's faith was not mental agreement with abstract statements about God. It was belief that led him to obedience.

One phrase that sometimes parallels the idea of belief in the Lord is "the fear of the Lord." This kind of fear is grounded in true faith (Deuteronomy 31:12-13). Job is identified as one who feared God and turned from evil (Job 1:8; 2:3). Those words state his condition both positively and negatively. When Abraham said at Gerar, "there is no fear of God in this place" (Genesis 20:11), he was describing a city in which there were none who trusted in the true God. To fear the only true God is to hold Him in deepest reverence. Many ancient peoples did have a superstitious fear of many false gods and evil forces. However, this did not lead them necessarily to turn away from evil, as was the case with Job, nor was it based upon any special revelation.

In the New Testament, faith means firm persuasion, based upon *hearing* the Word of God (Romans 10:17). The words for *believer* and *unbeliever* are variants of this word. The fundamental idea refers to confidence in what God has said. Confidence means firm persuasion or conviction that implies commitment to the Lord and submission to Him.

Equivalent Expressions For Faith

Other expressions are also used to indicate the way we are saved. These include receiving Him (John 1:12), hearing God's Word (John 8:47) in the sense of responding (John 12:47), beholding the Son (John 6:40; 12:45), coming to Jesus (John 5:40), calling upon the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13), confessing Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9), looking unto Him (Isaiah 45:22) and following Him (Mark 2:14). This evidence (following Him) is close in meaning to "abiding" or "continuing" in Him, which is evidence of true faith.

No one of these expressions should be emphasized as though it included the sum of doctrine about how to be saved. By faith believers accept "the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Salvation is a gift in the sense that it cannot be earned. It is not a ticket to Heaven passed out at church meetings, without commitment to the Lord and reliance upon His finished work. Condensing the message of faith into a simple invitation to "receive this free gift" does not deal honestly with the whole teaching of Scripture about how to be saved.

The same could be said for reducing faith to the idea of asking (John 4:10). Believing is more than asking. Neither is Revelation 3:20 a proper foundation for the advice, "Just ask Jesus into your heart" so you will be saved. That phrase is one of the

most abused salvation formulas. This Bible verse was not used in an evangelistic context. This portion was written to the Laodicean church, which the Lord said He would vomit out of His mouth. This would indicate they for the most part were unsaved. It was not a formula for being saved.

God's Word As The Ground Of Faith

When the Philippian jailer was saved, it is said that he and his house “believed in God” (Acts 16:34). This does not refer to believing in God’s existence, but rather to what the jailer had been told by the apostle Paul concerning the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). We usually believe something we have read, or that has been told to us, or from some other source. What is the basis or foundation of what we believe in a saving way? It should be the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 10:17). Faith comes from hearing, or reading the Word of God, or by a message from God’s servants as to what God has said (Romans 10:14). We believe “the witness of God” in the Scriptures (1 John 5:9). We believe that God is true in what He says though every man be found a liar (Romans 3:3-4). We believe “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago” (Titus 1:2).

Thus, faith is attached to the testimony of God given to us through the Holy Scriptures. The apostle proclaimed “the testimony of God” because it is essential to saving faith (1 Corinthians 2:1). Faith is not about the creeds or traditions of churches, or the human assurances of leaders or family members, no matter how well meaning. It is not just subjective confidence in our heart or what we think personally. If faith is not directly attached to what God says in His Word, then it is resting on another foundation. It is the Bible that tells us about

a God who is willing to redeem His people, a God who sent His Son to die for us on the cross, a Christ who is “able to save to the uttermost [forever, completely] those who draw near to God through Him” (Hebrews 7:25). Without this, our faith would rest on the shifting sands of human subjectivity based on “feelings.”

The Lord Jesus Christ As The Object Of Faith

There is no question but that the New Testament presents the Lord Jesus as the object or focus of saving faith. He invited people to come to Him, follow Him, trust in Him and obey Him. It is “whoever believes in Him” who has eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus said, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6). Some may call this concept narrow-minded, bigoted or extreme, but Jesus Himself is the authority for this exclusive claim that rejects all other religious approaches to God. He said, “I am the Door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9). To those who asked what work they might do to please God, He replied, “This is the work of God that you believe on Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29). Believing is not a religious good work whereby one earns salvation. It is a response to the command of God. God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). The Gospel of John declares it was written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

A person cannot believe whatever he or she pleases about the Lord Jesus to be saved. We should not create a subjective Jesus according to our own wishes and trust in Him. We are bound to the testimony of God about Him. It is important to ask,

“Who is Jesus?” To say He was a great man, a prophet, even the foremost man in history, is insufficient.

John’s Gospel begins with the statement that Jesus is the Word of God and that He existed from an eternity past. “In the *beginning* was the Word” and the Word was God. “Beginning” does not mean when He came into existence. He has always existed. As God the Son He is both distinct from God the Father and yet co-identified often with God. Jesus is God the Son, not God the Father. As such He interacts with the Father within the remarkable unity of the one, yet plural God. As the Son of God, He became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He entered a world which He had created but which did not know Him (John 1:10). Most of His own people (the Jews) did not receive Him, that is, as their Creator, God and Savior. It is in the sense of receiving Him personally as our divine Lord that we can become children of God (John 1:12). Such are we who “believe in His name,” which means believing all that He is.

If you do not believe that He is the I AM (the name of God from Exodus 3:14), Jesus says you will die in your sins (John 8:24). Jesus once told the people, “I and My Father are one,” the last word being a word of essential unity (John 10:30). That caused His hearers to attempt to stone Him. When He asked why, they replied, “For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy because you being a man, make Yourself to be God” (John 10:33). They understood clearly who He claimed to be.

It is necessary to understand that receiving Christ is not a matter of saying a rote or ritual prayer (as is often suggested), but rather a matter of believing who He is: our Creator, and our Lord. Thomas realized this when he said, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). Both ideas (Lord and God) are implied in

Romans 10:9: “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” In his first sermon, Peter openly proclaimed Jesus as both Lord and Christ, the promised Deliverer of the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 2:36).

The apostolic proclamation of Christ emphasized His resurrection from the dead and hence His victory over sin and death (Acts 2:31-32). It was the risen Lord Jesus to whom men and women were called to be saved. He said, “Come unto Me” (Matthew 11:28). Salvation is in a Person.

Personal Relationship With Christ By Faith

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). Salvation involves a personal relationship with Christ. The New Testament word for faith is often followed by other words that add light to the subject. A common construction has Jesus as the object of faith (John 3:16; Acts 20:21). Literally this means to “believe into.” It denotes a faith which, so to speak, “takes a man out of himself and puts him into Christ,” says Leon

Morris in the *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. “This construction suggests not only intellectual credence but also moral commitment to the person of Christ according to R.E. Nixon in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. This “faith union,” as it has been called, is the basis of the comparison with human marriage in Romans 7:3-4. There it points out that believers are “joined to another,” meaning Christ, in a lasting union (see also Romans 6:5). Coming to Christ is not just walking up to Him and shaking hands. It is turning yourself over to Him, body and soul.

The Saving Content Of Faith

In view of the centrality of the Lord as the object of faith, it is misleading if we separate Him from any part of what He did to accomplish our salvation. A verse such as Acts 16:31 is not a complete statement of the message of salvation, but rather is one sentence in a Scriptural narrative. The message, of which Jesus is the central personage, is called the gospel or “good news.” The gospel in which the Corinthians believed, included the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The Lord commanded His disciples to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). The sequence of salvation for the Ephesians was that they first heard the word of truth, the gospel, then they believed the gospel, and then they were sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). The gospel was first proclaimed to those who then believed (1 Thessalonians 2:9; Acts 15:7). “The power of God” is in this message of good news which leads to salvation for the receptive soul (Romans 1:16). Any who would alter its basic content or seek to add religious work or religious rituals to the requirement of faith is under a divine curse (Galatians 1:6-9). As we have noted, there are brief references to elements of the gospel which do not constitute a complete statement. Sometimes it is done by simply calling people to believe in Jesus. His blood or sacrificial death is emphasized in Romans 3:25. The cross, where He died, is emphasized in 1 Corinthians 1:18. The resurrection is emphasized in Romans 10:9; Acts 17:3, 18, 31-32, and in many other places. No one aspect should be exclusively emphasized so as to deny or leave out the other elements.

This powerful message centers in the living Word of God and leads to the new birth (1 Peter 1:23). The apostles therefore were careful to preach Christ fully wherever they went

(Romans 15:19-20), sowing the wonderful seed (Matthew 13:3-8). Paul said, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

From this description of content, we see that knowledge of the gospel is necessary for salvation. Proclamation brings the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4) that leads to salvation (Luke 1:77). The gospel must be preached (Romans 10:14), or distributed by the printed page. It requires the sending forth of missionaries and evangelists. All people must hear of the present, living Lord Jesus and His substitutionary death for our sins (1 Peter 3:18), which pays the wages of our sins (Romans 6:23). Each hearer must understand how God will justify through faith the one who believes in Jesus (Romans 5:1). Such evangelization will not lead people to a dependence on past prayers, “dedications” and church rituals as a hope of Heaven.

Obedience To Christ Necessary In Faith

Both the will and the intellect are involved in saving faith. The Lord Jesus said, “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God” (John 7:17). When we are willing to do God’s will, we are ready to submit our own will to God, which means to obey Him. Neither willingness nor readiness implies the need to do good works, or to abstain from evil ones, before submitting to Christ. God’s call to us from Old Testament times was often, “Obey my voice.” That command was first directed to a rebellious, sinful people (Deuteronomy 8:20; Jeremiah 7:23-28). God calls us to choose life or death. He offers blessings or a curse, depending on our choice (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Disobedience is classified as unbelief (Hebrews 3:18-19). Disobedient people, in the sense of habitual practices, are unsaved people (1 Peter 2:7-8; Romans 10:21). Thus they are called “children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2; 5:6). The parable of Luke 19:14 describes the reaction of such people to the Lord this way: “We will not have this man reign over us.” Jesus wept over His rejection by the people of Jerusalem and said He was willing to save them but they were not willing (Matthew 23:37; Luke 19:41-42). Therefore, saving faith is an act of the human will, yielding to the living Lord. The act leads to an inner willingness to obey Him. “You obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17).

To obey Christ (or the gospel) is a parallel expression to believe in Christ (or the gospel). The coming judgment of God will be upon those who “do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). Salvation is “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26). This is more than believing the facts. The Spirit of God is given in salvation to those *who obey Him* (Acts 5:32). The golden chain of salvation is stated in 1 Peter 1:2: we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” An act of obedience is involved in believing the proclamation of the gospel and the call of God. Believers are seen as “obedient children” (1 Peter 1:14). It has often been said that there are no rebels in the kingdom of God. Those who refuse the authority of Jesus are classified as His enemies and are therefore doomed (Luke 19:27). Eventually they will be compelled to bow the knee to Him in a coming day, for God’s glory, but it will be

too late for their salvation. Then “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow” (Philippians 2:10).

What possibly could hinder millions upon millions of God’s creatures, made in His image, from availing themselves of the eternal benefits of the gospel offer? The next chapter will examine several possible factors.

Study Guide Lesson 4: What Is Saving Faith?

1. How would you describe true saving faith? Be brief but sufficiently comprehensive.
2. Which of the verses most clearly states how to be saved in your opinion? Why would you choose this one as the most clear?
3. What must you believe about Jesus to be saved?
4. What does it mean to obey Christ or “obey the gospel” to be saved?

Lesson 5: What Are The Obstacles To Saving Faith?

“If I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?” (John 8:46), the Lord Jesus asked. That is a question worth thinking about. Why do people not believe the only completely truthful man who ever lived? Why can they not believe what they are told by a God who cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18)? Consider this verse: “He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10). Yet multitudes in effect do call God a liar by reason of their unbelief. It is said of the Lord Jesus, “He *marveled* because of their unbelief” (Mark 6:6).

The underlying problem in this unbelief seems to be in the area of the will. Since God “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), why doesn’t this happen in accord with His will? He has chosen in His sovereignty to grant people the right to choose whom they will serve (Joshua 24:15). They may elect to choose evil over good, rebellion over obedience, false gods over the one true God and their own way rather than God’s way.

Some theologians believe in what is called “the bondage of the will.” They deny the ability of people to freely choose their way in life. However, every verse of Scripture which calls upon man to choose, obey or submit to God’s will is one which denies this doctrine of inability to respond. Listen to these words of the Lord Jesus speaking to the multitudes in Jerusalem: “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing” (Luke 13:34). We see in these words man’s willful, sinful refusal

to respond to God. The Lord Jesus said in John 5:40, “you are not willing to come to Me that you might have life.” Here, plainly stated, is unwillingness to come to Christ, not inability. He is willing to save “whosoever will,” but the majority will not come to Him. Willingness is the key. “If anyone *wants to do His will*, he shall know concerning the doctrine” (John 7:17).

Stubbornness and its parent, pride, are a function of the will. The Lord’s condemnation of the nation of Israel clearly charges the people with this sin. “I knew you were obstinate and your neck as an iron sinew and your brow brass” (Isaiah 48:4); “I have stretched out my hands all day long to a rebellious people” (Isaiah 65:2). God was reaching out but the people stubbornly were refusing His warnings given through the prophets. The principal outcome of a stubborn will is a refusal to submit to the control of your life by the Lord. If you wish to be a follower of the Lord Jesus you must understand that this is unacceptable to God (Luke 6:46). Still, some people try and the next section shows how they expect to succeed.

Lack Of Submission To The Lord Jesus Christ

Such people, as identified above, imagine they can neatly separate receiving Jesus as Savior from the fact that He is Lord. Presumably you could thus receive “the gift of salvation” as you would accept a package from its place under a Christmas tree. Then they think they can defer until some later date the need to have Him as Lord. Juan Carlos Ortiz has likened this to standing up in a marriage ceremony and saying to your wife-to-be, “I receive you as my own personal cook,” separating one aspect of the relationship from the responsibilities of the full marriage commitment. The object of salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ. We have no authority to

divide His person when we come to Him to be saved. In the New Testament He is called “the Lord” over 500 times. It was the regular form used by the disciples to address Him personally. It is the title by which He is proclaimed in the book of Acts (2:36; 10:36; 16:31; 20:21) as well as in the epistles (Colossians 2:6; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Romans 10:9). Only about a dozen times is He mentioned as Savior alone.

Those who support the idea of separating His lordship from His saviorhood often misrepresent the position of their opponents by appealing to evangelical prejudice. They say we are saved by faith alone and not faith plus lordship. Of course, it is not faith plus lordship but a faith that involves the full Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have no right to narrow the scope of faith by narrowing the identity of the Person who is the object of saving faith. Further, it is sometimes said that we are calling people to a dedication to His Lordship. Rather we are calling people to Him, not dedication to a doctrine.

Objectors also say it is not possible to define “how much lordship,” ignoring the fact that one could easily say the question is, “How much faith?” Of course, it is not how much but in whom we are trusting. The critics say we are “subtly adding works to faith,” but there is no meritorious work involved in submitting to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. They say no one can know the full scope of the Lordship of Christ when he or she is saved, or be expected to apply this in advance. This is true, and the unsaved should not be expected to do this. But they should be open and surrendered to whatever He commands. Some teach that *Lord* in Romans 10:9 means only that we believe Jesus is God but does not include the idea that He is also our Master. How

could one receive Jesus as God and refuse the companion idea that He is also Master? Anyone who truly believes Jesus is God will assuredly acknowledge His authority as Lord. Salvation comes when there is “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

God’s Grace and the Holy Spirit’s Work Required

Are we suggesting that people can be saved by their own efforts? No. God’s initiative is essential for any person to be saved. Left to our own devices, none of us would be saved. God is presented in Scripture as the Great Seeker of His fallen creatures (Genesis 3:8-9). “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Unless God had sent His Son to earth we could not be saved. Unless He gave His Spirit to convict us of our sin and need, we could not be saved. Unless His Spirit regenerated us into new life, we could not be saved (John 3:5). Unless God drew us to His Son, we could not be saved (John 6:44), but this verse does not state that only a select few are drawn, as some infer. God says, “I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). Without the undeserved favor of God (grace), we would not have the opportunity to receive the gift of salvation, apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is a gift in the sense that we cannot buy or earn it by human efforts, but it is not a gift in the sense of a free ticket to do as we please. Salvation is of the Lord in initiation, provision, accomplishment and protection. None of these truths should be used to deny the necessity of human responsibility in receiving the divine message.

What is the relationship between God’s sovereign will and our human responsibility to respond? The omniscience of God foresees all that will happen in the future. It takes into account

the degree to which human action is considered (1 Peter 1:1-2). In this sense then those who are destined or appointed to eternal life will believe (Acts 13:48). At the same time, however, the Lord Jesus was grieved over those who were unwilling to believe (Matthew 23:37). There is a universal provision for all persons to have saving faith (1 John 2:2). The Scriptures never indicate that anyone cannot believe because God has failed to give him or her the necessary enablement. God calls on all people to listen that they might live (Isaiah 55:1-3). They are able but they must also be willing.

Continuation And Endurance Of Faith

True saving faith will continue throughout life by God's help. We can find great encouragement in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Saving faith is not limited to the time when a person makes a commitment to Christ for salvation. Faith is not a passing phase or momentary decision but the beginning of a permanent relationship. Four times the Scripture says, "the just shall live by faith." Assurance of salvation depends on our continuation in the hope we have in the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 3:6, 12, 14; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2). But this is not salvation depending on behavior. The verses cited show that defection from faith indicates it was never real (1 John 2:19; 2 John 9; 2 Peter 2:20-22). Abiding proves reality (1 John 2:24). Judas Iscariot is an example of defection. The book of Jude adds an extensive description of apostates, those who fall away (Jude 11-16). The endurance of true faith is supported by God's provision of new life in Christ and the indwelling presence and power of His Holy Spirit. It is also maintained by

the intercessory prayer of the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 7:25). Clearly, saving faith is not “temporary faith,” which is not really true faith (Luke 8:13) but faith that endures.

Moral And Transforming Consequences Of Faith

Some people think they can become Christians without any significant life change. Scripture teaches differently. Change should be expected of those who have truly passed from death into life, from darkness into light. “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is a very clear statement of the life-changing impact that occurs when a person is born again by the Spirit. How could people, with the life of God now functioning in them and the Holy Spirit indwelling them, exhibit no change from the old life? The changes might be either subtle or dramatic at first, depending on the kind of life lived before. Even a person who has not lived an immoral life should be aware of selfishness in relationships and of his or her past neglect in seeking a relationship with God.

Faith is more than mental agreement. True faith transforms people within and without. It has been asked, “If you are not saved from continuing in your sins in this life, from what are you saved?” Change was certainly dramatic in the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:9), in the early Jewish converts (Acts 2:40-47), and in the disciples who left all to follow Jesus. Faith that does not result in a life change, marked by good deeds, is said to be dead (James 2:14-16). Can such a faith as this save a man, asks James. The answer is “No.” In commenting on this under the heading “Mere Belief,” G.W. Bromiley (*New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*)

writes, “James is warning against the conclusion that mere assent is the justifying faith of Abraham and his believing successors, and in this James and Paul are wholly at one. See also Hebrews 11. While faith in Christ justifies, this faith is demonstrated in works, which operates by love (Galatians 5:6), and which necessarily implies obedient action.

The practice of righteousness is a mark of a saved person (1 John 3:7). The practice of sin, that is, habitually practiced sin, knowing it is wrong, is a mark of one who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 John 3:4-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5-6; Galatians 5:19-21). People are warned about listening to those who try to deceive them on this issue by insisting that a sinful lifestyle does not prove the lack of salvation. Those who “profess to know God but by their deeds deny Him” are said to be detestable (Titus 1:16).

In an effort to separate the issue of righteous living (sanctification) from the assurance of salvation, some teachers point out that justification and sanctification are entirely different, which is certainly true. Justification is a divine act whereby a holy God pronounces the sinner who believes in Christ to be righteous and acquits that person from all charges (Romans 3:24; 4:4-5). Sanctification, which comes from the word “to set apart,” means the separation of the sinner negatively from the defilements of sin and positively to the purposes of God. Because the terms are different in definition, these teachers claim it is necessary to separate the process of sanctification from salvation, which they would limit to include only justification. This implies that holiness or sanctification has nothing to do with salvation. The answer to this argument is that although *justification* and *sanctification*

are different terms, both are a part of coming to Christ and then following Him. Without sanctification or holiness, “No one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Sanctification is an integral part of the salvation experience (Acts 26:18). We are saved and called to a “holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9). We are set apart positionally as saints from the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 1:2). Saints means “holy ones.” Salvation’s purpose includes holiness. Having died with Christ and hence being justified, it is inconceivable that we should continue to live in sin (Romans 6:2).

Salvation is presented in differing tenses in the New Testament. We have been saved from the penalty of sin (1 Peter 3:18). We are being saved from the power of sin (Romans 6:6). We shall be saved from the presence of sin (Revelation 21:4; 1 Corinthians 5:5). The same three tenses are used in speaking of our sanctification. There can be no salvation without sanctification. “Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).

The above statements are not intended to imply that believers never sin or that there is no such thing as failure or being temporarily out of fellowship with God. Yet one cannot practice or habitually engage in lawlessness, or rebelliousness, as a way of life and still have Biblical hope of being one of the “children of the light” (1 John 3:9-10). One of the greatest props to such false hopes has been the misuse of 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 concerning the so-called “carnal Christian.” Immaturity and division are mentioned in this context, not habitual sin (E. Reisinger, *The Carnal Christian*, Banner of Truth). Many who think they are “carnal Christians” may well be deluded souls whose professions of faith are false.

Relation Of Repentance To Faith

The above sections concerning life change should have alerted us to the idea that there is no reason to turn to Christ as our Savior from sin (Matthew 1:21) if one has no desire for such a change. Many people would like God to spare them from their difficulties^” give them an insurance policy to go to Heaven. But they have no real desire to change their lifestyle. The forerunner of Jesus was John the Baptist, sent to prepare the way of the Lord. He preached the necessity of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:2-4). Those who heeded his message were baptized by him, “confessing their sins.”

John the Baptist made it plain to them that God sought changes in their lives, not empty words (Luke 3:8-14). Here we can see that repentance is related to an attitude about our sins. He did not ask them to weep for days, first stop sinning, reform their lives or make some kind of atonement or penance for their wrongdoing. He did seek a desire in their heart to have a change in the way they were living. This is consistent with the Old Testament message of God to a sinful people. “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him” (Isaiah 55:7).

In the New Testament, Jesus says, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3,5). His disciples went out and preached that the people should repent (Mark 6:12). On the day of Pentecost, Peter’s first sermon after the resurrection of Christ cut with conviction to their hearts. When they asked what needed to be done to be right with God, Peter answered, “Repent” (Acts 2:38). The warning was repeated many times (Acts 3:19; 11:18; 17:30; 26:20). It has been said by some teachers

that to repent means the same thing as to have faith. Yet the two are carefully distinguished in Acts 20:21. The words do not mean the same at all. Repentance leads to faith in Christ. That is why John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way of the Lord.

Repentance means a “change of mind” but we cannot know what this change of mind is about unless we see how it is used. There are other uses of the word, such as references to God having repented, where the meaning is different. *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* defines salvation repentance as “a fundamental and thorough change in the hearts of men from sin and towards God.” H.A. Ironside in *Except Ye Repent* says it is to “change one’s attitude toward self, towards sin, toward God, toward Christ.” The use of the word *repent* also includes the idea of willingness to turn from sin, not just to believe in Jesus (Revelation 2:5, 21; 3:3,19; Acts 8:22; 3:26). It is not faith plus repentance but a faith which includes repentance.

It is sometimes argued that because the word *repent* is not used in John’s Gospel, and only once in Romans, it is not necessary for salvation. These two books are important but we have no authority to eliminate a teaching found in the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation because it is not expressly mentioned in some other books. Certainly when Jesus brought the woman of Samaria to acknowledge her immoral life, He was seeking her acknowledgment of sin (John 4:17-18). When He warned a man to “sin no more” (John 5:14), He was not ignoring repentance.

Another claim is that *repent* is a word only for the Jews. Yet the New Testament says it is for both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 11:18; 20:21). It is argued that since sinners are “dead in sins”

(Ephesians 2:1), they are incapable of any such response to God. Ironside writes, “To say that because a sinner, whether Jew or Gentile, is dead toward God, therefore he cannot repent, is to misunderstand the nature of that death. It is a judicial, not an actual death. He is spiritually dead because he is separated from God.”

Those who oppose repentance as necessary to salvation have rightly pointed out that the word does not require prolonged anguish of soul, reformation of life or cessation of sinning as a prior condition to saving faith. Obviously, we need His enabling power. This is accomplished through regeneration unto new life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Unless we have a change of mind (repentance) about the way we have lived, as disobedient sinners, we are not prepared to receive Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Summary And Concluding Appeal

The extensive discussion in these two chapters may leave some with the feeling that we have made “simple faith” so complicated it is beyond the understanding of many. After all, you might say, the thief on the cross came to Christ without understanding all these aspects (Luke 23:39-43). That is a fair objection. We must remember, however, that “the good thief was face to face with Christ and in the extreme hour of dying. Yet he exhibited more comprehension than many of those praying to “accept Jesus” today. He looked to the Lord Jesus as one who would be victorious over death. He acknowledged Him as a King who was able to take even a thief (Matthew 27:44) into His heavenly kingdom. He turned from being a fellow blasphemer with the other thief and took sides with the Lord. He bowed to His authority and committed himself to the

Lord Jesus for salvation. That was sufficient then, and still is as a minimum basis.

We may summarize by saying that salvation begins with the initiative of God in sending His Son to save us (Luke 19:10). This is totally of grace. He draws us to Himself and convicts the sinner of the need of salvation by His Spirit (John 16:8). God sends His messengers to proclaim the good news that God is willing to save sinners through His Son. It is God the Son who came, died on the cross for our sins as a substitutionary sacrifice and rose from the dead a victor over sin, death and hell. When we understand this, when we repent, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, obey the gospel and rely entirely upon Christ to save us apart from any works of our own, then the Holy Spirit regenerates us and gives us new life. This life will endure and will be characterized by transformation.

Remember:

The only persons who need a Savior are those who have recognized their own sinfulness and helplessness to bring about salvation by their own efforts.

Such a person must necessarily depend upon what God provides for salvation, which is His Son “who made the substitutionary sacrifice for us.

That person seeks a true relationship with God through Christ alone, as the one who becomes his or her Lord and Savior through faith, which will result in the person’s obedience to God’s Word.

The purpose of God is to change lives here and now, bringing us to follow the Lord Jesus, as well as take us to Heaven.

Study Guide Lesson 5: What Are The Obstacles To Saving Faith?

1. What have you found to be the major problems in talking with someone who needs to be saved? Why is this so, in your opinion?
2. Why can't we just ask Jesus to be our Savior and postpone a surrender to (or not even mention) Jesus as Lord? Is this not adding works to salvation? Give Scriptures to support your answer.
3. Is it possible to be saved without any enduring life transformation? Why not? Give Scriptures to support your answer.
4. What is true repentance? Why is repentance an important part of coming to Christ to be saved?

Lesson 6: Sure Of Heaven: Good Or Bad?

If you are assured of going to Heaven and it's true, that is certainly good. In fact, it's wonderful! If your assurance is false, misguided or on a wrong basis, it's a tragic disaster.

Not many years ago the overwhelming majority of those professing faith in Christ considered any assurance of going to Heaven to be beyond our knowledge. "Nobody can know that" was the standard statement. Why not? It was assumed there would be a general judgment for all people at the end of time. There the good or bad deeds done here would be weighed in God's balances. Depending on which side weighed most heavily on these scales that measure human conduct, our eternal future would be determined by the Great Judge. People "hoped for the best." Often they "feared the worst."

None of this scenario is Biblically based. There is no single judgment for all people. There are separate judgments for the unsaved (Revelation 20:1-15) and the saved (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). The first is on the basis of unforgiven sins. The second is to recognize believers for their devotion to Christ and service for Him. Our eternal future is determined in this life, not after death. Eternal life begins on this earth and is settled on the basis of our decisions here. One is saved or lost before death comes.

If you are truly saved here in this life, God wants you to know it. "These things I have written unto you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Focus your attention on the word *know*, which means to have absolute knowledge. The same word is used in 1 John 5:19. We know that we are of God. First

John 4:13 says, “by this we know that we abide in Him.” Those verses certainly indicate that certainty and confidence are possible for the true believer. But they should not be the basis of false confidence for those whose professions are questionable.

Ministers can lend support to vain hopes or misplaced assurance. Preachers at funerals sometimes are said to have “preached someone into heaven.” I recall when the father of one of our young men died by firing a gun into his head while carousing with some women. He had previously left his wife and two children and refused to pay for their support despite a court order. His last words to them were these: “I will see you in Hell before I give you a dollar.” At the funeral service, which both the son and I attended, the minister used this text: “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith”(2 Timothy 4:7). Several of the father’s reprobate friends, seated in front of me, squirmed uneasily at this absurd description. His parents were convinced he was going to Heaven. So, apparently, was the minister who had never met him personally. He was merely hired to do the service. The same thing can occur with people who have lived a more moral life than this man.

How can we be sure we are going to Heaven? God has given us three witnesses that testify to our relationship with God.

1. *The Word of God.* God’s word is our strongest witness. Assurance of salvation is based on what God has promised (Romans 10:9; John 3:16, 36; 5:24). It concerns the facts of the gospel and God’s promises concerning those who sincerely believe these truths. It is not based on our

subjective feelings. The Bible often speaks of being saved, not feeling saved.

2. *Objective tests of true salvation.* Since people can be deceived, how can we be sure we have entered into God's salvation? The Lord said, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:20). Good trees bear good fruit, not bad fruit (w 17-18). These are the fruits or outcome of a divinely changed life.
 - a. *Obedience to God's Word* (1 John 2:4-5; 5:2-3). This obedience means the general manner of your life. We should be "practicing righteousness" (1 John 3:7, 10). This does not imply sinless perfection. None but Jesus has ever been sinlessly perfect. What it means is that you must admit, confess and forsake any sin that does occur (1 John 1:8-9). When you do sin, it should greatly distress you (Psalm 32:3-5). You should do good deeds for others (James 2:14-26; Ephesians 2:10).
 - b. *Confessing Christ as Lord.* You must confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord (Romans 10:9). The Master warns that not only does He command this, but He rejects those who fail to do so (Matthew 10:32-33). Don't try to be a "secret disciple." Confessing Jesus as Lord goes along with confessing Him as God the Son (John 8:24; 20:28; 2 John 9).
 - c. *Your love will be for the Lord* (Matthew 22:37-38; 1 Corinthians 16:22) and for your fellow believers as God's children (1 John 3:14). You will forsake a love for the worldly system of values and its lifestyle, controlled by Satan (1 John 2:15-17).

3. *Inward witness in your conscience.* There is a certain degree of subjectivity in this, so it should not be separated from the above two witnesses, the Word of God and our confession of the Lord. A third witness is called the witness of the Holy Spirit, assuring our spirit that we are God's children (Romans 8:16). You believe that Christ has died for your sins and that the debt is fully paid (Hebrews 8:12; Psalm 103:12). You sense a reality in prayer, that God is hearing and responding to you (1 John 5:15). You have inner peace (Philippians 4:7; 2 Corinthians 1:2; John 14:27).

Doubting Christians Or Unsavd Professors Of Faith?

At one time or another many Christians are troubled with doubts about their salvation. The following guidelines may prove helpful for those who question their own salvation. These attitudes contrast the saved and the unsaved:

Doubting Christians:

1. Are concerned about their relationship with God. They raise questions.
2. Often show repeated concern about their salvation. They worry about it frequently and wonder, "Am I really saved?"
3. Identify with Christians, though they often feel their own unworthiness to be one of them.
4. May question their salvation during mental, physical, and spiritual "lows" or during problem times in their lives.

Unsaved Professors of Faith:

1. Tend to be careless, even over-confident about being Christians.

2. Vigorously affirm the validity of their professions despite contradictory evidence in their lives; resistant or resentful of any questions in this area.
3. Often criticize believers and the Church; blame them for various prejudices and wrongs committed over time.
4. Show little or no recognition of current spiritual need.

Dealing with Doubts About Your Salvation

1. *Recognize Doubts.* You may have had spiritual worries similar to the following: “When I received Christ, nothing happened. I did not feel different.” “I don’t know whether I believed in the right way.” “I don’t have the witness of the Spirit.” “I believe I have committed the unpardonable sin.” When such apprehensions trouble you, remember that salvation is by believing and living accordingly, not merely by feeling. Make sure you understand what is the unpardonable sin (Mark 3:22-30) before assuming you have committed this deed. The unpardonable sin is to say that Jesus did His miracles by the power of Satan. No true believer would do this.
2. *Examine Yourself* (2 Corinthians 13:5). If your life is far from God or you are drifting away, it is a good thing to reconsider your relationship with Him. The following questions may help pinpoint your true spiritual state: “Have you ever known conviction of sin during your life and longed for God’s forgiveness?” “On what are you basing your hope of Heaven?” “When and under what circumstances did you receive Christ?” Any true believer has known conviction of sin and the need for personal repentance. He or she is basing any hope of salvation solely

on Christ and His work. Generally he or she will be able to recall at least some point in time where there was an unconditional commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Ask them, “Did your life change and show progress after that commitment? Did you love the Word and read it eagerly and regularly?” 3. *Confirm By Prayer*. Consider a prayer of complete surrender to Christ as Lord and Savior if there is any doubt of the reality of your commitment to Him. Repeated praying in this way, however, is no substitute for coming to the point of believing God’s Word and resting upon it. Do not rely just on feelings.

Jesus warned against self-deception in regard to salvation. Many will claim to have known Him and to have done much in service for Him, yet they will be cast into outer darkness because they were not true believers (Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 13:23-28). Therefore, if you should have any doubts, resolve them, using the objective tests of reality given above. A real commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior can be made if you still have doubts. Be sure you are going to Heaven, but be sure you have a sound Biblical basis for your confidence.

Study Guide Lesson 6: Sure Of Heaven: Good Or Bad?

1. Those who “decide to come to Christ” are helped if they have a mature believer and beginner study materials to assist them. Often these materials begin with a lesson on “assurance of salvation.” What is a potential problem if you start with “assurance”?
2. Almost every funeral service speaks of the deceased as having gone to Heaven or being now “with the Lord.” Even when everything about the person would raise questions

about this, the speaker will “preach them into Heaven.”
Would that this were possible! What would you
recommend to funeral service preachers as a better yet
tactful approach?

3. What are the evidences that testify to someone knowing correctly that they have eternal life? Give key Scriptures for each point.
4. How would you deal with someone who seems to be saved, yet still is deeply troubled about being sure of their salvation?

Lesson 7: Backsliders, Carnal Christians And Sinning Saints

Those who live carelessly in their spiritual path on earth often say, “I know I’m a backslider.” They feel they are Christians but admittedly are not living like followers of Jesus. It’s amazing to me how often the word *backslider* is used by such persons. I would think that some other Christian teachings of major importance or warning would occupy their minds. *Backslider* is an overused word with minimal Biblical foundation. In fact, the word isn’t used at all in the New Testament. In the Old Testament it occurs about a dozen times, especially in the books of Jeremiah (3:6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22; 31:22; 49:4) and Hosea (11:7; 14:4). Its setting and meaning indicates an apostate, one who completely rejects the truth and turns away from it.

Only a remnant of Israel lived as true believers, faithful to the Lord. The nation as a whole was considered to be apostate, degenerate, rejected and under the judgment of God. As the “wife of the Lord” she had become unfaithful and adulterous, a spiritual prostitute. God divorced her (Jeremiah 3:8; Isaiah 50:1). One of the prophet Hosea’s children was named “Lo-ammi,” meaning “you are not my people”—God indicated that He had completely renounced any relationship to them. The word *backslider* is not an accurate term for someone professing to believe but living far from God. It will, however, no doubt continue to be used like that.

Another common expression, much overused or misused, is that of “carnal (or fleshly) Christian.” These are true believers, according to the major passage dealing with them (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Carnal Christians feed on spiritual “milk.”

They are immature believers who have failed to grow properly. Nothing in Paul's description given here makes it appropriate to apply this term to a person who lives a habitually sinful or God-neglecting life.

Do Christians ever sin? Of course (1 John 1:10). In what way do believers who sin differ from unbelievers? For believers sin is not a normal characteristic of life. True believers practice righteousness (1 John 3:7). They do not sin regularly, repeatedly, habitually (1 John 3:8), especially deliberate sin (1 John 3:4). No one who is born of God can live a life in which lawless sin (known, yet still committed) is a practice (1 John 3:9). "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Whosoever does not practice righteousness is not of God" (1 John 3:10). True believers sin, but they never sin by rejecting their hope in the gospel. They do not become apostates. They do not continue in a life of habitual, unrepented and deliberate sin.

When true believers do sin, it grieves them deeply (Psalm 32:3-5). They confess and forsake their sins (Proverbs 28:13). They long to be restored to a true fellowship with God (Psalm 51:1-17). If they do not judge themselves (1 Corinthians 11:31) God disciplines them as His children (Hebrews 12:5-11). He does not eject them from His family. God's discipline can include sickness and even death (1 Corinthians 11:30). It is to be feared. Such persons should "tremble at His Word" and fear His displeasure. Those who are not true believers seem to have no fear of this. They return to their former sins repeatedly. It is as a "dog returns to his own vomit" or "a sow, having washed, to wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:22).

A true believer is known as a sheep. In Scripture a believer is never called a dog or a pig. Those terms refer to those with a false profession, who were never true believers. Yes, believers do sin. Yet they are no longer slaves to sin as they were when unsaved (Romans 6:16-18). Their lifestyle now is one of obedience from the heart. They are freed from sin's power (Romans 6:18). To live righteously they must consider themselves to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). They must daily yield their bodies to God as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13; 12:1-2). They desire to cooperate fully with the Holy Spirit to walk according to His will (Romans 8:4, 11-13). Believers are given the Scriptures for their instruction so that they "may not sin" (1 John 2:1). They are to pray that they enter not into temptation (Mark 14:38) or place themselves in situations that are spiritually dangerous. They must "resist the devil" (James 4:7) and resist temptation. The Lord has "granted" to them "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). It is up to believers to avail themselves of every divine provision to avoid sin or offense to God.

The life of those with a false profession is quite different. Their spiritual life is wasted away. I recall questioning a young woman one time about her relationship to the Lord. I have done this hundreds of times with all kinds of people. At a certain point in the conversation I asked, "When and where did you hear and believe the gospel? When did you receive Christ as Lord and Savior?" She named a certain time when this "spiritual experience" occurred. "Did your life change then?" I asked. "Yes," she said. "How long did the change last?" I persisted. "About one hour," she said, to my astonishment. "What happened then?" She replied, "I started to backslide."

That must be a record low for life transformation after profession. Judas Iscariot lasted three years, with more signs of life than some persons I have met. With others the time might last longer or shorter. At some point, however, false profession will break down and fall apart.

A word of caution should be given here. It is a questionable practice for anyone to say to a professing believer “you are not saved” on the basis of their opinion. There are believers or preachers who act as self-appointed judges. They may carelessly label someone unsaved on the basis of externals, that is, not of the inner being. They may disapprove of certain clothing as immodest. They may object to jewelry. They may object to television in general or to what in particular is watched. They may object to smoking. They may require certain hair length, or a certain type of head covering. They may object to any makeup on women. Many of these things might be undesirable. But they should not be the basis of our saying, “You are not saved.” That is not a pronouncement we should make readily.

The Lord warned about judging others on the basis of outward things. First Samuel 16:7 says, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” An individual might outwardly appear righteous, but inwardly be “full of hypocrisy” (Matthew 23:28). It is not that which comes from without that defiles a man, said the Lord, but what comes from within (Matthew 15:11-20). It is the unrighteous and hypocritical heart, sometimes seen in religious people, that is the problem (Matthew 23:25-28).

Read applicable verses from Scripture and make your own self-appraisal. Let the Holy Spirit do His work in convicting

you of your spiritual need. You are saved on the basis of *having spiritual life* (in the Son) not light (spiritual understanding). You may have received very little teaching on proper Christian living.

In seeking to help others it may be helpful to *discern* the reality of their profession of faith in Christ. Discerning is not the same as pronouncing a verdict or “judging.” How else could one appropriately give needed spiritual guidance? Because believers have the means to overcome any obstacle in their spiritual life, they ought to live differently from the unsaved. So don’t accept or use the label of “backslider” without true knowledge of what this means. Let it not be an excuse for a God-displeasing life. Be sure you do not profess to be among His people yet someday hear the words of the Lord Jesus, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:23).

Study Guide Lesson 7: Backsliders, Carnal Christians And Sinning Saints

1. Recall any person you have met who claimed to be a backslider but who probably was never saved in the first place. How did you handle them? Or, what should you have done if you had been better prepared?
2. How would you handle a person who has had many episodes of serious sin, such as immorality, and who makes this statement: “None of us are perfect.” Or, “I believe God forgave me when I asked.”
3. What is the difference between a believer who sins and an unbeliever who sins, especially while professing to be a Christian? Read 1 John 3:4-10 and Psalm 51.

4. Why is it not wise to tell anyone “I believe you are not saved,” or “I believe you are saved”? What is the best way to deal with people about whom either you or they are not sure of their relationship to Christ?

Lesson 8: What About Children Being Saved?

The God who wants all people to be saved (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4) certainly wants all children to be saved. The Lord Jesus said, “Permit the children to come to me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Luke 18:16). How and when do little children enter God’s Kingdom? There has been much division and confusion over this issue. Men and church systems have devised ways of salvation for children, but often they are ways with no sound Biblical basis. Certainly there cannot be two ways of salvation, one for adults and another for children. A child must be saved on the same basis as anyone. That way has been set forth in previous chapters.

The problem with helping children to be saved is that it is impossible for an infant, for example, to understand intelligently the gospel and exercise saving faith. Because of this difficulty, certain church systems have taught that all children of believers are automatically counted as saved because they have Christian parents. One possible source for this idea is 1 Corinthians 7:14. With even one believing parent, the Bible says that the children are counted as “holy.” What does this mean?

In Scripture, even non-living things such as the Temple vessels or priestly clothing were considered holy in the sight of God. Why? Because they were set apart for God’s use as ceremonially sacred. It had nothing to do with salvation. To be considered “holy” means that the children of believers are placed in a position of privilege or favor. They are exposed

early to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. They are under God's special care during early childhood. It does not mean they can be sure of salvation for the rest of their lives.

Often parents who do not even attend church call us and ask if we will baptize their infants or children. When we say, "We don't do that, even for infants in our own congregation," the conversation ends. We understand they want to somehow guarantee their children will be in Heaven. If we thought baptism would save children we would baptize every child on whom we could lay hands. I wish we could, but we can't do that with a good conscience and Biblical authority.

The children of Israel were called "the chosen people." They were set apart for God's purposes, yet many still rebelled against the Lord and were lost. The Lord said, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me" (Isaiah 1:2). They have forsaken the Lord. They have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel (v 4). They were called to repentance and promised cleansing if they returned to Him (vv 16-18). But for the most part the people did not listen to God. They faced the judgment of eternal fire by failing to do so (v 31). The same thing can happen to "holy" children of true believers once they are beyond their early childhood and therefore personally accountable to God.

Many times people say, "I have always believed." But no one has always been a believer. We have been sinful, at least in tendency, from birth. David said, "I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). The Lord said of Israel, you "were called a transgressor from the womb" (Isaiah 48:8). We are born with sinful natures, not as innocent, unspoiled little creatures. We are part of a

condemned race beginning with Adam, long before the Law and the Prophets were given. That is why “death reigned” (Romans 5:12-21) and divine condemnation faced us all (John 3:18). We cannot be “born again” by fleshly birth (John 1:13; 3:5-7) or water baptism. Spiritual birth is a requirement to enter the Kingdom of God.

What then is the fate of infants and small children who die during early childhood? David said of his dead child, “I shall go to him but he shall not return to me” (2 Samuel 12:23). He expected to see his child in Heaven.

Sins were cleansed prior to the time of the Lord Jesus. Animal sacrifices anticipated the great and final sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. He was called “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The reckoning of Christ’s salvation work, reaching backward in time to the first man, is called “the pretermission of sins” (that is, those sins committed before Christ’s sacrifice). When people responded to God, obeyed Him and offered the appropriate animal sacrifices, it sanctified (set them apart from the unsaved) “for the purifying of the flesh” (Hebrews 9:13). Only by Christ’s shed blood can there be forgiveness for anyone (Hebrews 9:12, 22). That includes the sins of Old Testament believers, whereby the sins of the faithful were covered, backward in time, by the anticipated death of Christ.

God is free to apply the blood of Christ to anyone He wishes, from man’s beginning to the end of time. It is a part of God’s character to be absolutely just, impartial and righteous. “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right [or deal justly]?” asked Abraham (Genesis 18:25). We can trust the destiny of all infants and small children to such a Judge. It is not necessary to

invent a doctrine such as “limbo.” This is a transitional or confined state, invented by Roman Catholic theology to which babies or children were sent if they had not received Christian baptism. This concept enabled the church to avoid the horrifying thought of “infant condemnation” for any unbaptized child. There is no Biblical basis to invent offices like godparents (taking vows for the child) or to have confirmation services (the children assuming these vows for themselves). There is no salvation in the waters of baptism. There is no clear and distinct account in the New Testament of a baby or small child being baptized. If salvation of such ones were possible, the Bible would plainly say so. Sprinkling water or making “the sign of the cross” on their foreheads does not make them believers. It is understandable, however, that concerned parents want such rituals to be sure their child, by this means, is going to Heaven. Remember, however, that some of the most evil men of history such as Adolf Hitler were given early Christian baptism by the church.

Bible-teaching, gospel-preaching churches (called fundamental, evangelical or just conservative) have their own pitfalls to avoid. Because they believe personal faith and commitment to Christ must precede baptism, there often is undue haste in pressing children to make “decisions for Christ.” Child evangelism workers, camp speakers and counselors, Sunday school teachers and concerned parents gladly assist, or even press, children to “ask Jesus into your heart.” Some lead us to believe that children even from ages two to five can make a mature, intelligent commitment to Christ and thus be saved. Obviously, they must think they are not saved prior to this, unsheltered by the blood of Christ. Children are often told to pray a prayer or come forward to be

saved. “You want to be with Jesus, don’t you? You don’t want to go to Hell, do you?” Of course not. So they make a “decision” under emotional pressure.

This brings before us the mystifying “age of accountability,” the age when children are supposed to become accountable to God for their souls. What is this age? No one knows. There is no Scripture covering this. Perhaps it had better be called “the age of comprehension” at which age children can understand what behaviors are sinful and require repentance. When can they recognize selfishness and disobedience as sin? Are they convicted, concerned about this? When do they really understand the gospel? Do they know who Jesus is and what it means to be saved? Is it too much to expect a simple understanding of these salvation truths in connection with a “decision for Christ”? It may be that the age or time differs with each child. The stages of child development include a transitional time called puberty, which does not come at an identical age for everyone. Although Jesus at the age of twelve took a significant step into the adult state (Luke 2:40-52), that can only be considered a guideline, not a Biblical law. Children ought to know right from wrong early in life, but children differ greatly. Maturity, as reflected in the ability to make important moral decisions, often comes at a later age. Although children can understand gospel facts early in life, they may not be ready to make a moral decision affecting their entire future until later.

It is important that children not be manipulated or pushed into “decisions.” Even when a child begins to ask significant spiritual questions, this is not necessarily the best time to press them to pray about being saved. It may be wiser to wait

for the emergence of true spiritual comprehension and a strong desire to be saved. Simple salvation reading matter or a Bible course may help. Children should be encouraged to talk to a mature, respected worker or teacher rather than going only to their own parents. Possibly the parents may not be fully objective. Do not be in a hurry. Is there real conviction, concern, earnest desire and persistence in seeking God? If so, we suggest that you have them write out a simple testimony as to how and when they repented and surrendered to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, fully trusting His work for their acceptance by God. Explain it carefully. Review it even more carefully.

The work of the Spirit enables even children to live as God-pleasers. Believer's baptism is the expected aftermath of a salvation experience (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38, 41). It is also important to help children understand the privilege of participating thoughtfully in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). Baptism and the Lord's Supper go together as the only two New Testament ordinances commanded by God for observance by His people.

There is a typical but worrisome pattern in many children professing to be Christians. First, there is a point of "asking Jesus into your heart." Then there is a long delay without being baptized. Then may follow a period of spiritual drifting or not following the Lord. Then there is the "rededicate my life" stage, still relying on some early childhood prayer. The rededication could be a surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. If there is evidence of this, it is more likely the real point of conversion. When regeneration truly occurs, spiritual life begins to grow. Maybe at this point the child should consider baptism. If there

is a breakdown or “falling away” from the Lord, His people and His ways at any point, the child’s relationship to the Lord needs to be reconsidered—by them, by their parents, by their teachers. This is a decision of considerable importance. Do not be so quick in referring them to 1 John 1:9, which says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” That may be true, but only if one is sure they are truly saved. Salvation involves more than confessing your sins to God. Restoration to fellowship by a believer to God requires more than confession. It also necessitates forsaking the sin in question (Proverbs 28:13).

Can children be saved? Yes, in the same manner, on the same basis, with the same gospel message by which anyone is saved. The life pattern that then follows is called “the things that accompany salvation” (Hebrews 6:9). That means living for Christ today. It should not be based on a hope relying on an early childhood “decision” when there is little or no evidence of the transforming presence of the indwelling Spirit.

Study Guide Lesson 8: What About Children Being Saved?

1. How have you dealt in the past with children who asked, “How can I be sure of going to Heaven?”
2. What would you do now in dealing with a child who inquires about being saved? What Scriptures would guide you?
3. What have you believed in the past, or now, about the so-called “age of accountability” in children? When can you be reasonably certain that a child is now responsible before

God to respond to Him in repentance, understanding the gospel, and submitting their lives to Christ?

4. What are at least three dangers in the area of child evangelism which should be known and avoided?

Lesson 9: What About Those Who Have Never Heard?

The question, “What about those who never heard about Christ and the gospel?” is reasonable and is by no means easy to answer. Surprisingly, it is most often, but not invariably, asked by the unsaved, those who object to the gospel invitation. It is less frequently asked by people seriously concerned about the condition of the unsaved. I answer their challenge like this. “Would you surrender your life to Christ in faith if I answer this?” Not a single person has said, “yes.” That is not the issue which hinders them. The major issue, in my opinion, has to do with allowing Christ to control their lives. The question still deserves an answer of some sort. We cannot fully answer the doubts of some about the necessity of salvation through Christ alone unless we deal with this issue. Even believers can have honest doubts about it.

We must first face the many Scriptures that point to the lost condition of all humankind. We then must deal with the teaching of the Lord Jesus and the apostles, which emphatically states that Christ is the only way to God. It is not a matter of narrow-minded claims by those of us with a presumed religious bias. It is what God says in His Word.

Are All The Heathen Lost Without Christ?

The word heathen has been variously translated in Scripture as Gentiles or nations. It means unevangelized peoples. It is not just those in a low or ignorant social condition. The term lost means unsaved, separated from God. They are lost to God and their lives are lost on earth. Like all unsaved people they

are “condemned already” (John 3:18). They are heading for a lost eternity. The Lord Jesus stated His mission in coming here in Luke 19:10. “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Without the Lord’s coming and the gospel He preached, the lost would continue to be “without hope and without God in this world” (Ephesians 2:12). The Lord called His Old Testament people to be a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, and those who sit in darkness from the prison house (Isaiah 42:6-7). That is a vivid description of the spiritual condition of the heathen.

The future of the unsaved is not that of annihilation, as many believe. The unsaved never cease to exist. They will live in eternal, conscious torment. The Biblical idea is not extinction but ruin, loss. It is not loss of existence but of well-being (Vine, *Expository Dictionary*). The Lord illustrated this with His well-known account of the rich man in Hell (Luke 16:23-30). In the four Gospel accounts Jesus used the word hell, usually the word *gehenna* in Hebrew, about ten times. Gehenna is the place of endless burning (Revelation 20:10, 14). Jesus spoke more of Hell than Heaven, and described it as a terrible place of suffering. It is a place of eternal separation from God, a place from which there is no hope of escape. All those in the world need salvation here and now, lest they perish (John 3:16). All are “under sin” (Galatians 3:22; Romans 3:9). All are “by nature the children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). They “sit in darkness and the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79). Why? Because all of us are sinners before an absolutely holy God (Romans 3:23).

People often say, “There are many ways to God.” To them all religions are equally valid, equally true, despite the many

contradictions among them. All that is necessary, they say, is that we be “sincere” in our beliefs. The Bible, however, teaches the opposite. God ordered the destruction of the Canaanites, the ancient inhabitants of the Holy Land, because of their religious practices, their idols and evil ways. God denounced the worship of the gods of the Egyptians, the Babylonians and the mythological deities of the Greeks. He brought to an end the worship of Roman deities. He condemned spiritism, and astrology. There is no teaching in Scripture of reincarnation, which is returning to earth in a different form on the basis of “karma,” or one’s good deeds. There is no “second chance” after this life.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were chosen by God to be custodians of the Holy Scriptures, showing the only way to God. To them was given the great honor of bringing forth the Deliverer, the Messiah, who would save the inhabitants of the world. We know Him as Jesus of Nazareth.

The God of Israel, the God of Abraham, is the only true God and the Creator of all things. His plan of salvation was shown in Old Testament symbols or rituals and in God’s Word. There are not many gods. “There is one God” (1 Timothy 2:5). There are not many ways to God. Jesus said, “I am the way the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). He was the Word of God who took upon Himself humanity (John 1:1-14). We must receive Him as Lord and Savior to become a child of God (John 1:12). Only if we have Him do we have eternal life (1 John 5:12). If someone does not believe in the Son and obey Him, “the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). The Bible contradicts the doctrine of universalism, that someday all will be saved (Matthew 25:46).

This is why we send missionaries to all the world, at the specific command of our Savior (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). This is why He commands believers to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20). This is why the Lord warns believers against neglecting the responsibility of telling others the way of life and warning the unsaved of the consequences if they neglect to take heed (Ezekiel 3:18-19). The question is asked in Scripture, “How shall they call upon Himwhom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). This is our challenge.

We must tell others that Jesus is the only way of salvation, although others may accuse us of being intolerant or bigoted. When we proclaim that it is Jesus who said this (not us), that He is the only way to God, there is an inference made. All other religions are false (Acts 4:12).

What shall we say then about those who never have heard of the true way of salvation? Our only sure knowledge is from the Lord through His Word. Let us review thoughtfully the situation concerning these “who have never heard.”

1. There is *spiritual light from God* for all. This is the true light which “enlightens every man” (John 1:9). Perhaps it is an inward awareness that comes upon everyone that there is a supreme God who made man and to whom all must be reconciled at some point. Overwhelmingly, even amid today’s atheistic propaganda, people say they still believe in God. Under the most intense pressure of communist dictatorships and atheistic government-controlled education, people still believe. That conviction is more than a fear of the unknown or an emotional dependency.

We are not responsible for what we do not know, or for what is not available for us to know. We are responsible for living up to whatever light or understanding we have. God is completely righteous, just and fair. We can trust Him to evaluate any isolated individual's response to the spiritual light which has been given. Sadly, they seem rarely to do this. Rather, they "love darkness rather than light" (John 3:19). The unsaved usually do not like to retain the one true God in their knowledge (Romans 1:28).

Often they create their own concepts of God. "They are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). It is tragic to have "no hope" and be "without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). It is worse when people are not troubled about it.

2. There is *the witness of conscience*, which is closely allied to the first point. This is what gives us the ability to differentiate right from wrong. It is called the awareness or conviction of sin, for which people will be held accountable. Romans 2:15 states "they show the work of the Law [God's Word] written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them."

Conscience can be defiled by sin, hardened and even deadened to pain as if "seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). On the other hand, we can also live, if we so choose, with a "good conscience before God" (Acts 23:1). Additional spiritual light depends on how we respond to our conscience.

3. There is *the witness of creation*. The most ignorant person can look around, gaze at the heavens, and see the evidence of intelligent design in the world. It is inescapable. Some

great Being made all this. That is why only a fool says, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). There has been an enormous campaign to convince people that the intricate life and detailed design seen in the world is a random accident. Life is seen as arising uncaused out of nothing, or from a “primordial chemical soup” whose origin is undefined. Man is said to be a descendant of single cell organisms, then fish, then apes. Yet no undisputed transitional forms have yielded clear proof from the fossil record. There should be millions of those “in-betweens” if they existed. In astronomy, we have “the big bang theory” as the beginning of our universe. But what caused the bang? What was the first cause of all other causes? This makes one think of Romans 1:20-22: “For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse; because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful; but become futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened; professing to be wise, they became fools.”

How is more specific knowledge of the true God brought to those who have not heard? First, God can and does bring honest seekers to someone who can instruct them. One Biblical example of this is Cornelius, the Roman officer (Acts 10). He was unsaved, a devout man who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms (charitable gifts) to the Jewish people. He prayed to God continually (v 2). He had a vision and was told that God had noted his earnest seeking for the Lord (vv. 3-4). He was directed to contact Simon Peter to find the truth of salvation in Christ. At that point the apostle was

taught “that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness [does what is right] is accepted by Him” (vv. 34-35). Then Peter proclaimed Jesus to Cornelius and explained how the death and resurrection of Jesus was God’s way of dealing with his sins and that he must have faith in Him (vv. 38-43). Cornelius believed and was baptized. This is a case of God bringing a seeker to someone who would explain the gospel of Christ to him.

A second way is for God to bring His servants into contact with one who is open to the truth, as in the story of the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-39). An angel of the Lord called His servant Philip to go to a desert place and speak to a solitary man reading the Scriptures and pondering their meaning (vv. 26-28). The Ethiopian said he could not understand what he was reading without help (vv. 30-31). Philip explained the prophetic passage which pointed to Jesus the Messiah (vv. 32-35). The Ethiopian said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (v 37) and was baptized on the spot. Thus we see that the Lord can either bring a seeker to one who can explain God’s way of salvation, or He can bring the worker to contact the seeker.

It has been suggested that God will treat the unevangelized on the basis of His omniscience. This means that He knows how people would react were the gospel presented to them, even if they had not heard it. The basis of this is Matthew 11:21-24 where the eternal fate of the inhabitants of Tyre, Sidon and even corrupt Sodom are mentioned. Jesus says, “They would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” if they had seen His miracles. He said it would be more tolerable for them

in the day of judgment. But the lessening of the severity of judgment is not the same as being saved. The Lord's comparison between wicked cities and those Israelites who rejected Him is very limited in making it a hope for the heathen. It may be true, but it is still speculation.

The fact is that when preachers and missionaries proclaim the gospel many people are saved. When the Scriptures are translated into foreign languages and then distributed, many are saved. Without these two factors, few get saved.

It does seem that today God still speaks to certain individuals by dreams or visions. This is reported among Muslims and other groups who are kept by their government and religious leaders from hearing the gospel. Presumably a special revelation is given to those who "live up to the light given them," or who are sincere seekers. Yet the numbers are few.

Hudson Taylor, famed missionary to China said, "I do not believe the heathen are lost because they have not heard the Gospel. If the heathen are lost it is for the same reason that other men are lost, because they are sinful men." On another occasion he said, "I would never have thought of going out to China had I not believed that the Chinese were lost and needed Christ."

There is an unavoidable necessity to face the truth that we can only be saved through the Lord Jesus by the application of the merits of His work in dying in the place of every sinner. "He Himself is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). According to the Bible, there is no salvation possible other than that provided through the Son of God (Acts 4:12).

Study Guide Lesson 9: What About Those Who Have Never Heard?

1. In the past, what has been your attitude (inner conviction) about the salvation of those who have never heard the gospel of Christ or even know much, if anything, about the Lord Jesus? How did it affect your actions, if at all?
2. Using Scripture, briefly show the evidence that all unsaved people are lost unless they are cleansed from their sins by the blood of Christ.
3. Define and then show from Scripture why these doctrines are not true to Scripture.
 - a. Annihilationism
 - b. Universalism
4. List at least three ways in which those who have not heard the gospel still have some spiritual light from God. Give supporting Scriptures.

Closing and Summary

This book is written with the desire, which is also that of God, that as many people as possible be saved. It is directed in particular to those who rely upon a false assurance.

We have tried to deal with many difficult questions, on which there has been prolonged debate. Our reference point has been this: “What does the Scripture say?” (Romans 4:3). That was always the reference point for what the Lord Jesus said. He told His listeners to “search the Scriptures” for the way to find eternal life (John 5:39). He expounded upon them (Luke 24:27). He told the questioners among the religious leaders they were mistaken in their understanding of spiritual matters because they did not know the Scriptures (Matthew 22:29). For Him, in quoting the Bible, the matter was settled by the simple statement, “It is written.” That was the final Word and there was no more authoritative word.

Those who profess to honor the Bible as the Word of God need to compare diligently what they believe or think, especially about claiming to be Christians, with what the Scripture says specifically. The same is true of those who merely respect “the good book” as one of many good books. If it is good in any sense, then it ought to be trusted and not neglected as to what it says about being saved. There is a terrible and eternal danger in having a misplaced confidence in our personal views about this subject.

The best way to face God in eternity is to be prepared to answer this theoretical question, “Why should I let you into My Heaven?” The answer should be simply, “The Spirit of God has convicted me of personal sin and my need of a Savior. I

have no merit of my own to claim your acceptance. The Lord Jesus Christ died as a substitute to pay the penalty of my sin and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I have truly believed the message of the gospel in the Bible, the Word of God. I have repented of my sins and committed myself without reservation to Jesus Christ as my Lord, my God and my Savior, with the intention to live for Him.” If you have done that then you are on solid Biblical ground. In fact, it should be the only ground of your confidence. May this be true of every thoughtful reader of this book.

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To God be the glory.