

Is Baptism Necessary For SALVATION?

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*An understandable theological paper considering whether or not salvation is by God's
 Sovereign grace or a multi-phase co-operative effort between God and Men*
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Want a SHORTER VERSION? SKIP DOWN TO PAGE 33 and read through 53!

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1. Introduction, Approach, and Principles

As I address the issue of the relationship of baptism to salvation and the broader issue (that salvation is by God’s sovereign grace), I want to be up front about where I am coming from in several areas.

My Attitude toward Folks in Churches of Christ/Christian Churches

First of all, I think that many who belong to “Christian” Churches or the Church of Christ know and love the Lord. I think there are significant numbers of true believers within these ranks, even in the stricter Church of Christ, and I anticipate enjoying heaven with them. However, to be frank, I do think that a number of folks within those ranks have a false hope of salvation precisely because their mixed message encourages them to trust in good works and acts of obedience to make them right with God. Nonetheless, others are trusting in the merits of Jesus Christ and not merely acknowledging His work on Calvary, but depending upon it. This is sometimes *in spite* of what they are taught, not because of it. I do want to be clear on this as well: some Christian Church pastors agree with me in the realm of salvation by faith alone apart from baptism. They might have a conviction

that weekly communion is God's will or that baptism should occur on the spot, but those are minor differences. So in the rest of this paper, when I refer to "Christian" churches, I am referring to those churches holding the view that baptism is necessary for salvation.

To be fair, we must admit that there are also very likely many lost people (who have a false confidence regarding their salvation) within the confines of conservative evangelicalism -- but often not because they are taught incorrectly. I believe tares are mixed with the wheat in even the best congregations. Those who embrace Jesus as Savior (the one who has provided salvation for us) are truly saved, as I see it; in my view, others (who merely acknowledge the atonement and give assent to the salvation Christ provided but focus upon their baptism, communion, and good works) are like the Jews of old in Romans 10:2-3:

"For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since ***they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.***"

This problem of making oneself out to be his own savior is common, unfortunately, even within evangelical churches preaching salvation by grace through faith. In such cases, preachers preach grace, but many folks still hear "works." But when additional conditions and works are added as grounds for salvation, the problem escalates. Obviously those who believe in the necessity of baptism for salvation would see things differently! So rather than try to conceal my opinion, I am expressing it upfront.

The branch of the Campbellite family called, "The Disciples of Christ", is not addressed in this discussion, since that denomination is predominantly liberal and does consider itself bound by and accountable to the Scriptures (understood in their intended sense); I view them as any other liberal mainline denomination.

My Theological Conclusions

I would also like to also be **upfront** regarding my theological perspective. Like many on the other side of this issue, I **seek** to be Biblical. I am not out to follow any man-made system. My conclusions about what the Bible teaches (regarding salvation) include unconditional election (you'll read more about this below) and perseverance of the true believer (eternal security, though I prefer the first term). This closely parallels 80% of the conclusions drawn by Calvinists (I recognize four out of five of the "Points of Calvinism," but I certainly am not into following Calvin; I just happen to think he and his followers have drawn proper conclusions from studying the Scriptures -- well, at least 80% of the time).

Terms Defined

Because of my assumption that readers will be driven to find out what the Bible actually teaches, I will save space in presenting my Biblical arguments by defining terminology.

That is the purpose for using terminology in the first place. Even the word “Bible” is an extra-scriptural term that saves us from saying a mouthful: “the 66 book division of Scripture, including the 39 books of the Hebrew Scripture and the 27 books of the Christian Scriptures.” Instead, we just say, “Bible.”

Those who have concluded that the doctrine of election is unscriptural and hold the conviction that believers can lose their salvation will be referred to in this paper as Arminian. That does not mean they follow all the teachings of Arminius, just that they happen to agree with Arminius on those points. I will employ the same logic for the opposite term Calvinistic. It becomes rude and arrogant in such a discussion to say, “I am not a ---, I just believe the Bible” when both sides lay claim to a true alignment with Scripture. Let us all assume in this discussion that we want the teaching of the Bible to be the final authority.

Another term I need to define refers to those who follow the doctrinal perspective common in the Church(es) of Christ and Christian Churches, namely that one is not saved until he repents, believes, AND is baptized (and sometimes other conditions are added as well). The term referring for this belief system incorporates the name of the founder of that movement, Campbellism. By using this term, I do not believe that folks in these churches follow the teachings of Campbell blindly as Mormons do Joseph Smith, for example. The term “Campbellism” or “Campbellite” are used to refer to those who agree that the Bible’s teachings and what Campbell taught about the relationship of baptism to salvation are in agreement.

Assumption of Integrity

I hold a view of baptism similar to most Baptists (unlike Calvin, who practiced infant sprinkling). However, I hold these viewpoints not because I have an agenda to align myself with Calvinists or Baptists, but because I have concluded this is what the Scriptures teach. There are very few conclusions we might come to about the Bible’s teaching that someone else has not already concluded (be they accurate or inaccurate).

I will also say upfront that there are verses, when, taken by themselves, do *seem* to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. Those who hold the Campbellite view *are not stupid*, nor are they necessarily any more stubborn than conservative evangelicals (both groups excel in this area!). If we only had the verses that Church of Christ folks camp on (such as Acts 2:38), I could conclude what they have concluded. Although other conclusions are possible even when those verses are isolated, the Campbellite conclusions certainly seem a viable option.

My contention is that looking at the broader teaching of Scripture persuades us to select differing conclusions than do the Campbellites. But this is not an unusual situation: many verses in Scripture taken in isolation could be disastrous (plucking out an eye, the example of Jephthah sacrificing his daughter, Abraham marrying his half sister, etc.). Although I disagree with some of the Campbellite views, please understand this: I do not view them as I would Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, or the cults. I do think they err

significantly, and that some of their errors distort salvation by grace through faith; their beliefs also result in an exclusivist mentality that isolates them from the evangelical community; this limits the blessings (and challenges required to hone truth) that come from experiencing the broader Body of Christ.

An Assumption of Goodwill

So, for purposes of simplicity and clarity, *I will assume that readers of my viewpoint and readers who differ are both driven to be true to the teaching of God's Word.* That is why, for example, I will take the pains to enumerate and provide vast amounts of (taken in-context) Scriptural quotations. *Readers are encouraged to examine the contexts themselves*; my personal attempts at sincerity are no guarantee that I am correct. I could be sincere, but still sincerely wrong. I recognize I am not the ultimate interpreter, and, frankly, some of my interpretations somewhere must be wrong (since no two Christians agree on every detail in every area). It is up to the reader to discern my batting average in the case before us.

So what I am presenting is my UNDERSTANDING of what the Scriptures teach. The Scriptures are infallible, but our interpretations are not. We can try to enter into the culture and mindset of the human authors and audiences, and we can try to interpret objectively and without pre-existing agendas. But if we are serious about humility, we have to admit that none of us are the ultimate in objectivity; we can only, with God's help, try to keep ourselves in check.

Is the Belief that Baptism Is Not Necessary for Salvation Tied Directly to A Calvinistic Model?

Contrary to what some theologians from the Churches of Christ and Christian Churches have written, **most evangelicals (by far) do not believe in the doctrine of unconditional election** (that God chooses people for salvation apart from anything they do) although more (but still a minority) do believe in eternal security (once saved, always saved). *I am among the minority of evangelicals who believe both of the above.*

Most evangelicals, then (like the Assemblies of God, most independent Charismatic churches, Wesleyans, Nazarenes, Free Methodist, those conservatives within mainline Protestantism, those evangelicals who have chosen to remain within Catholicism, and even significant minorities of Baptist and Brethren groups) reject eternal security, yet almost all of the above do NOT believe one must be baptized to be saved.

Most believe that baptism is not an option for the Christian, but that it is separate from (thought associated with) salvation. For the sake of simplicity, I will leave out the various views held by evangelicals who believe in infant sprinkling (not to insult them, but merely to limit this work), as well as views held by liberal mainline Protestants (I don't mind insulting them!).

So the belief that one is saved upon belief, before being immersed, is the common belief of most evangelicals, those who believe in election and those who reject unconditional election. Nonetheless, if one believes in election, the issue itself loses force, as I will hope to convince you below.

In this paper, I will not argue much about mode or timing of baptism. I am assuming that readers recognize that I am addressing believer's baptism by immersion after a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. The baptismal candidate recognizes that Jesus is God in the flesh, Who bled and died for our sins and then arose a conqueror. I happen to agree with Campbellism on the idea that baptism is for believers only after a profession of faith.

If I fail to persuade you to my viewpoint, I at least hope to persuade you that those of us who believe in salvation by grace through faith (and baptism as a non-optional ritual following but separate from salvation) have some scripturally reasonable arguments, even if you reject our viewpoint.

I do not believe baptism is an optional matter, but is a mandatory command. As a matter of fact, I would never join a church that did not exclusively practice believer's baptism by immersion. But I do not believe baptism is crucial to salvation. (I believe that my born-again Presbyterian or Reformed friends are saved, even though they disagree with me about mode and manner of baptism). Baptism is a matter of obedience.

Interpretational Approach

The Two Goals of Interpretation

To my way of thinking, there are **two goals in interpretation** (as opposed to application), and they may be summarized in the form of two questions:

(1) What was the original thought of the author? In some Scripture, God dictated His Word. In other portions, the Scripture is BOTH the Word of God and the Word of Man. Paul, for example, knew just what he meant when he wrote Romans. We should therefore try to enter into his thinking.

(2) How would the original recipients (or audience) have understood what was written or said? Too many Christians ask, "What does this mean to me?" before they ask, "How would the Roman believers have understood this?" The Bible is the Word of God, a verbally inspired and inerrant book, but it is not a magical book. The words express thoughts, and we must get at those thoughts. Attention to grammar and to the cultural background of the original recipients provides meaningful clues to the meaning of a text.

I also embrace the conviction that Biblical Christianity was best understood by the early church, composed of Messianic Jews (see Acts 21:20). ***When the majority of the church became gentile*** (the halfway point was reached in about 75A.D.), ***the Jewish***

assumptions of the New Testament were not as well understood and soon lost. This is why the church of the second and third centuries took such sharp turns away from Biblical teaching and objective interpretation. Beliefs deteriorated -- (as I see it) into infant sprinkling, one central leader, etc. -- almost immediately after the apostles were off the scene.

Four interpretational judgment calls that come into play

1. Is a statement a partial truth or a whole, complete truth?

“All women are human, therefore all humans are women.” Saying “all women are human” does not mean there are not other categories of human (in this instance, men). This is perhaps the most common interpretational (and logical) error made.

On the other hand, Jesus statement in John 14:16 about being THE way, and no one coming to the Father but by Him is so worded that it is a complete truth. He cannot be “a” way because He is “the” way, and He makes clear that there are no exceptions.

2. Does a group of things connected together mean all elements of that grouping contribute equally (or at least partially) to the result stated?

Take Jonah 4:11, “But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”

Just because God mentioned cattle here does not mean that his compassion for the city was as greatly affected by the number of cattle as it does the number of men. As a matter of fact, we might presume that God would have still had compassion upon Nineveh if they had no cattle.

At the tomb of Jesus, Mark tells us that an angel said, “He is not here...” Matthew tells us there were two angels at the tomb. Both are true. In this instance, Matthew gives us the fuller truth, Mark simply wants to let us know who is doing the talking (an angel). He does not address the issue of how many angels were present. The second angel was present, but did not contribute to the conversation, so Mark was not inaccurate by leaving him out of his narrative; Matthews’s inclusion does not mean that both angels spoke.

I would suggest that some of the small number of verses that seem to imply baptism is necessary for salvation should be included under this category.

3. Do two seeming realities that seem to preclude one another force a choice between one or the other, or can they both be true, even though it is beyond our ability to reconcile them with our level of information and understanding?

A bumble bee, according to the laws of physics, cannot fly. So does the bumble bee really not fly, or are the laws of physics wrong? Or do we accept them both, believing they are somehow reconcilable, even though we seem incapable of making that reconciliation?

God is one being, yet He is Three Persons. So is His oneness really incorrect, or are His three personalities really not distinct and separate? Or do we accept them both, believing they are somehow reconcilable, even though we seem incapable of making that reconciliation?

Jesus is fully human. Jesus is fully God. Do we say Jesus was just a phantom, or do we deny His deity? Or do we accept them both, believing they are somehow reconcilable, even though we seem incapable of making that reconciliation?

Much of the Bible was written by men, using their own vocabulary and styles (except for the parts dictated), yet it is the Word of God. So is the Bible the Word of God but not the word of man, or is it the word of man but not the Word of God? Or do we accept them both, believing they are somehow reconcilable, even though we seem incapable of making that reconciliation? The Bible offers many such paradoxes and antimonies.

Some can be easily reconciled. The Scriptures are clear that no man has seen God, yet we read of Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel seeing God (among others). The reconciliation in that case is simply that no one has seen God in His pure, unmasked form. They have, instead, seen visual representations of God.

One real issue between those who believe baptism (and any number of other potential requirements in addition to faith and repentance) is necessary for salvation and those who do not relates to this question: Is it a number one situation or a number two judgment call? **Do we collect all potential contributors to salvation and create a master list, or are the Scriptures so repetitively clear that we understand these other numerous items to be merely the evident fruits of regeneration?**

4. Do I distinguish between what was commanded and what was done?

To my knowledge, there is no clear cut verse that says we are to follow all the practices of the early church. This should not be automatically assumed. We are commanded to observe the traditions Paul taught (as revealed and commanded in the epistles).

For example, the early church generally conducted their services in Greek, both the men and women wore robes, folks greeted one another with a holy kiss, and the men and women sat in segregated sections of the home in which they gathered. They did not own church buildings, nor did their leaders attend Bible College or seminary. Are we obligated to follow their pattern?

We must therefore make careful distinctions between what the early church *did* and what we are *commanded to do*. Much of what they did, we are likewise commanded to do, but

not necessarily in the same way (e.g., there is no command to my knowledge that says we must have a love feast meal before celebrating the Lord's Supper, but that does seem to be the example of the early church based on I Corinthians 11; we are nowhere commanded to observe the Lord's Supper every week, though the early church seemed to do so on a sometimes daily basis, we are not commanded to have all things in common and sell all we have and give our means to the church leaders, etc).

These four judgment calls must be made intelligently, prayerfully, and **consistently**.

2. Necessary for What?

You can tell what one's priorities are by how he understands incomplete questions. Like ink blotches in a psychiatrist's office, these questions reveal what is on our minds.

Most often, when I hear someone ask, "Is baptism necessary?" I have learned to interpret it as, "Is baptism necessary to salvation?" The question is generally asked by folks who DO believe baptism is necessary to salvation, and it reveals that they are focused upon "making it to heaven."

On the other hand, those of us who believe that baptism is NOT necessary to salvation want to hear the question as, "Is baptism necessary to please God and grow in ones walk with Him?" The answer to that question is, "Of course it is. Duh."

Differing Concerns

The way the question is initially heard advertises the differing emphases between these two camps. One is mainly concerned about "making it to heaven," the other feels secure and (ideally) is concerned with pressing on toward spiritual maturity. Sadly, there are people in both camps who are not much concerned about anything doctrinal!

The believer who understands that salvation is an unearned gift, not a probationary loan, can more logically focus on serving his Lord and building up the kingdom; he might be concerned about losing his rewards (being saved "so as by fire"), but eternal life is not in the balance; the believer who considers himself just a step away from damnation and whose destiny hangs in the balance moment by moment is more obsessed with what he *doesn't* do. His concern is making the grade and not losing eternal life at the last moment.

The result is two very differing forms of Christianity. The issue is much broader than, "Is baptism necessary for salvation?" The matter addresses this question: Is salvation a joint effort between man and God or is it totally of God? (Theologically, this contrast is between monergism—one, namely God, doing all the work, and synergism—a co-operative joint effort; I am obviously a monergist). Is Jesus Christ the Savior, or are we partly our own saviors? Is He a half or even 90 per cent savior? Or is He 100 per cent Savior—He completely does ALL (in the fullest sense of the word) the saving?

Two conflicting viewpoints: faith alone or not?

Within Bible-believing Christianity, we find many differing opinions in a multitude of arenas. There is nothing I believe that someone else, also claiming to be a Christian, denies. And that is true for each of us. Although descriptions vary, most definitions of what it means to be an evangelical Christian include the belief in salvation by grace through faith apart from works.

Yet within this broader category, there are numerous views as to what a “work” is. Most of us would include in this category rituals (such as baptism, fasting, communion, church membership). Others argue, “Those are not works – they are ‘means of grace.’”

Works, we are told, are things like helping the little old lady across the street (even if she doesn’t want to go?) or visiting a shut-in. Yet the Bible makes no distinction between rituals and good works. Works are put in contrast consistently with being saved by grace through faith. Grace means God’s undeserved, unmerited favor.

Very few (if any) of those I have met who believe one has to accept Christ (repentance and faith) AND be baptized in order to be saved stop there. They invariably include additional works as necessary for salvation (in contrast to merely evidencing salvation). So we are ultimately addressing a much broader issue: is salvation by God’s undeserved favor – graciously given to him “who works not,” or is it a multi-step (you’re on probation) “trial size” salvation? Is it “share ware” that expires after the thirty day trial unless you pay for it, or is it truly and completely free?

This contrast between grace and works -- something we earn and something we receive freely -- is made clear for us in Romans 4:4-5. Paul elaborates upon this theme (talking about God graciously choosing some Jews for salvation) further in Romans 11:5,

“So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. **And if by grace, then it is no longer by works**; *if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*

Logically, everything must be divided into one of these two categories. Since grace comes solely from God, **everything else** MUST be a work. There are no third choices allowed in Paul’s contrast. As Romans 4:4-5 puts it:

“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

Note here that God justifies (credits as righteous) the “wicked.” They are still “wicked” when they are justified. It doesn’t say God justifies the “formerly wicked.” If they cleaned up their own act, that would be a work, a wage – not an unmerited favor.

Romans 3:21-27 tell us that God provided a gracious payment for our sin through the death of Jesus Christ. This is how a God Who is holy, righteous, and just can freely forgive; through His Son, He Himself paid the penalty.

“But now righteousness **from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ** to **all who believe**. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified **freely by his grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as **a sacrifice of atonement**, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, **so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded.** On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.”

Salvation by grace through faith involves nothing of which we could boast about. *If we can take even a slight credit for our salvation, we have left the realm of complete grace.* If we take credit for anything we do – even believing – we have a basis for boasting about making the right choice. I would like to add this: if we take credit for choosing to be baptized and thus saved, we have contributed something, albeit something relatively minor, to the salvation process. The righteousness we receive comes from God completely, not from within ourselves. Although God does help us to become righteous in character, the righteousness being spoken of here is bestowed upon us from God Himself. In the words of the KJV, this is what we call “imputed” righteousness (see also 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Coupled with the idea that baptism is necessary for salvation is a firm Arminianism which stresses human responsibility to the exclusion of a Sovereign and Immutable God who needs no one (Acts 17:25, “And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else...”). See Appendices below regarding God’s immutability.

Although it may seem that the heart of the debate revolves around a few passages in Acts, it really centers upon the very nature of God Himself (and the nature of fallen man). God’s attributes, especially His immutability and sovereignty, are perhaps the core issues. I shall address some of these issues later in this study.

A Deductive Check

In math class, I was taught to “check” a problem by reversing it. In other words, you check a subtraction problem by adding the difference, etc. The same is true in Biblical interpretation. If our viewpoint is correct, we should see it displayed or lived out in Scripture.

Please note this important logical inference: if one is teaching salvation as Paul taught it, the same question should arise, the one they asked Paul. It is: “Shall we sin that grace

may abound?” (Romans 6:1). **If this question would not logically come to mind with your presentation of salvation, then you are not proclaiming the same message that Paul proclaimed.** *If we preach the message Paul preached, this question should arise.*

An Arminian or works Gospel would not raise the question. The obvious answer to “Shall we sin that grace might abound” would be, “No, for we would lose our salvation.” But that is not the answer Paul gives. An Arminian presentation would never provoke that question. But if someone taught that we were saved freely by grace through faith in Christ, and that we were foreordained to believe and therefore secure, the question of why we should avoid sin WOULD arise. *This is a very logical argument, and I urge my readers to ponder this one deeply.* Please think about this. This argument itself should cause an Arminian to reassess his views.

The implications of that conflict

The implications of this difference of opinion vary with the Campbellite, since there are variations from extreme “you have to be baptized to be saved/non-instrumental Campbellism” to an approximation of the evangelical view that one is saved by faith alone espoused by a minority of the Christian churches.

Some teach that even believing in Christ and being baptized upon profession by immersion is not enough; they require candidates to be baptized under their auspices. Others recognize any believer’s immersion as adequate, while others are unsure whether baptism is or is not necessary for salvation. Some independent “Christian” ministers even agree with my position and identify with the evangelical mainstream.

Some would say that a person who has believed in Christ and been immersed upon his profession of faith is still lost if not indoctrinated with Campbellite viewpoints and is not genuinely born again. Others would say he is a brother in the Lord. Most would say that a Presbyterian or Reformed or Methodist believer (like Jonathan Edwards or Wesley) who has professed Christ is unsaved because he has never been baptized by immersion as a believer.

The same perspectives are reciprocated. Many evangelicals doubt the salvation of someone embracing Campbellite theology because he is not trusting Christ as the sole basis of his salvation, but shares that trust with baptism and/or other good works. They would apply the principle from Galatians 5:4, “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”

So people on both sides of the argument accuse their opponents of being unregenerate and preaching a false gospel, thus labeling their opponents as false teachers. Certainly both schools cannot be right; someone is (or both are) wrong somewhere.

3. Viewed from the Viewpoint of a Sovereign God Who Provides Sovereign Grace: Prove Election and Baptism is Placed in Perspective

As I see it, a correct view of the Sovereignty of God and of unconditional election destroys many false plans of salvation and clarifies how gracious (completely and totally unmerited) grace really is. Of course not everyone agrees that my understanding of Scripture is correct! I respond to such folks with tongue in cheek: “Nobdody’s perfect.”

I must admit that I am convinced that the Scriptures teach that God is Sovereign and that salvation is totally -- not just mostly -- of God.

Unconditional election guarantees that **WHATEVER** the requirements are for salvation, they will be fully met for the elect.

Like God zapping Saul on the Road to Damascus (how much of a choice did he have?), the turning of the Jews to the Messiah at the end of the Tribulation (Zechariah 12:1-2), or his saving and sealing the 144,000 Jews during the Tribulation, God is not at the mercy of human fickleness, but draws His elect to Himself irresistibly. At least, that’s how I see it. He does the converting -- completely. He coaxes us along to faith. Paul, who said his conversion was to serve as an example (I Timothy 1:16), did not have too much of a choice.

“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience **as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.**”

Although man exercises faith, God creates that faith and coaxes the elect to salvation. The “zap” may not be as impressive as the zap Paul received, but it is a zapping nonetheless. Enough chatter. Here are the verses!

A Crash Course in Sovereign Grace

The doctrine of election and the idea of God’s sovereign grace are deep subjects. Many Bible scholars have written books about this meaty matter, and the theme itself raises many questions (most of them are quite easy to answer, though we do not always like the answers).

What I hope to prove is this: God has chosen individuals for salvation apart from anything good in them. All those whom God has chosen (elected) will be saved; those He has not chosen will be lost. Whatever is necessary for salvation (in my view, repentance and faith in Christ), the elect will attain – no if, ands, or buts.

Let's lay our foundation. If God did not elect certain individuals, no one would choose Him. Romans 3:10-11 reads,

“As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.’”

In Romans, Paul argued that when society had knowledge of God, they abandoned the knowledge of the true God and created their own gods. Rom. 3:11 does not say, “no one seeks after a god;” the issue is seeking the true God. The true God is not appealing to the natural man.

Romans 8:7 continues along this theme:

“the sinful mind is hostile to God.”

Again, the God being spoken of here is not just any god, but the true God. The sinful mind is not necessarily hostile to a false god. The sinful mind is especially hostile toward a God Who sovereignly elects some to salvation while passing over others, as is implied below. People do not like this kind of God.

Since,

“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14),

It takes a miraculous work of the Spirit for a man to accept the things that come from the Spirit of God and to understand them. Through the Holy Spirit, God overcomes man's lack of desire for the true God, man's hostility toward the true God, and man's refusal to accept the things that come from the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 2:1-10 presents the sequence of this work. I will present my comments between the verses using a different font:

Ephesians 2

1. As for you, you were **dead** in your transgressions and sins,
2. in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.
3. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, **we were by nature** objects of wrath.

Note that all of us were at one time, “objects of wrath.” We were dead in our transgressions. Dead men don't believe. They just stay dead. So it takes a

miracle – a spiritual resurrection we call the New Birth or regeneration to bring us to life so that we can believe.

4. But because of his great love for us, **God**, who is rich in mercy,
5. **made us alive** with Christ even **when we were dead** in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

Note that God made us alive; it wasn't some joint effort we and God did, nor something other Christians did – God Himself brings us to life, even though we were dead. This is done not because we somehow deserve it (it is not a reward or earned), but by grace (favor) precisely because we deserve none of it.

6. **And God raised us up** with Christ **and seated us with him** in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,
7. in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Once we are brought to life, we have a position in heaven with Christ already, and we are enrolled in His eternal school, the school of learning about His incomparable grace forever. Although we remain on earth for a time, our legal position is in heaven. Also worth noting is this: if we have free will now (and I do not believe we ever have a truly free will, I prefer responsibility), then it cannot be that important because we will not have free will once we are in heaven (unless you believe we can lose our salvation after we are already in heaven). Since we are already legally and positionally in heaven, seated with Christ, an Arminian viewpoint could logically be pressed to logically conclude that we could lose our salvation a million years into eternity OR that our free will is not absolutely necessary for our soul's health and we will lose it in glory.

8. For it is **by grace** *you have been* saved, **through faith**--and **this** not from yourselves, **it is the gift of God**--
9. **not by works**, so that **no one can boast**.

The whole process of salvation: God's grace that saves us and even the faith we exercise is not from ourselves (the term "this" or "that" is neuter in the Greek, referring neither to only grace nor faith, but the whole process of salvation, all of Ephesians 2:1-10). Even the faith with which we believe comes from God as a free gift. We are brought to life apart from anything we do. The evidence of this spiritual resurrection, this regeneration is that we exercise the faith God gives us and we become believers. We are brought to spiritual life first, and then we believe. Although this occurs in a split second, spiritual life comes first, and then our belief follows. Only a spiritually alive person, brought to life by the Spirit, can believe (see the verses mentioned above from Romans and Corinthians).

It is also worth noting that the phrase, “you have been saved” is the perfect tense, meaning the event has already occurred and carries with it a current result, “you have been and now stand saved.” Although some aspects of our salvation are yet future (“the redemption of our body” in Romans 8), believers are already saved and are positionally in heaven because they are in Christ and Christ is in heaven. Note Colossians 3:3-4, “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

If I did one thing, no matter how minor, that distinguished me from lost people and resulted in my salvation, I could boast about that one thing. But I did nothing. God did it all. That’s why it is completely grace. No saved person can boast about anything as pertains to salvation. It is not that he shouldn’t, but that he cannot for there is nothing to boast about.

10. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God not only brings us to spiritual life so that we believe, He also brings us to spiritual life so that we fulfill the good works He has prepared for us to do. Faith and good works do not make a person elect, but rather they are the result of being elect, the fruit of genuine regeneration. They are the fruit by which Jesus said others would recognize His disciples. Only people who are saved can do good works that truly please God, for Romans 8:8 says, “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

So in order to do good works in the fullest sense, one must already be regenerate.

Although this portion gives us a logical order of the process of conversion, let me go to some clear-cut Scriptures that, to my way of thinking, prove that God elects us.

But please note this: the term election is not double talk, it means something. If it merely meant God knew what people were going to do, then the authors of Scripture did us a disservice. The Scriptures abound with statements about God knowing what would happen before it did happen. We should not try to cancel out the meaning of the word “elect;” the term is used for a reason, to add information, not to be neutralized by being thrown into some circular argument.

I agree that God knows who would believe apart from election. No one. Romans 3:10-11 is clear. But God knows (especially loves) certain people in advance. He knows whom He is going to choose before they are born. Although this contradicts the American idea that “all men are created equal,” (which we know is not true simply by observation), election is, I believe, what the word of God teaches. It is not so much a question of whether lost people can believe, but whether they would. Without election, no one would believe. Yet God does hold every person responsible. I admit that this creates a difficult

question, but the question did not stop Paul. They raised it on him in Romans 9 (a text we will see later).

But please note this: **If what we teach about salvation matches what Paul taught, we should logically provoke the same questions that Paul's readers asked.** *If our "plan of salvation" could not logically raise the questions that Paul addressed when he presented the Gospel, then there is something defective in our presentation.* Does that make sense to you?

But first, let us note the basis of God's electing of both individuals and His nation. We can begin with the reason for God choosing Israel from Deut. 7:7-8 "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers."

God's singling out Israel for His blessing had nothing to do with the people's might or disposition. God had a special love for them because He had a special love for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this sense, He "foreknew" or fore loved this nation. But His choice of that nation had nothing to do with a special openness to God (they were often called a stubborn and stiff necked people).

Now let's talk about a few of many New Testament passages; please look at them in their context (you might take a moment and read John 6, at least the latter half); I think you will agree that I have not torn them out of context:

NIV John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

Note the promise that "All" the Father gives Jesus WILL come to Him, and those Who come (because they are given as a gift by the Father) will never be driven away. Jesus will not reject the Father's gift. The only condition for coming to Jesus in this way is that one be a gift from the Father. Once the elect (another way of saying those who are the Father's gift) do come, they are never in danger of being rejected.

This passage clearly teaches that salvation is dependent upon the Father's choice of individuals who make up a gift to the Son. It also strongly argues for eternal security.

NIV John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Only the elect are the true believers; it is impossible for someone to truly come to Jesus if He is not drawn by the Father. But those who are drawn are raised up. Additionally, John 6:61-68 (you'll need to look them up) contrast the "disciples" who were non-elect from those who were elect. The non-elect found His

teaching offensive; the elect were drawn by the Father. Even though the elect disciples failed Jesus (and Peter even denied Him), they demonstrated that those who truly (unlike Judas) come to Jesus will never be cast out.

38. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

39. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

40. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Note here again that the Father's will is that the Son loses none of all that the Father gave Him. Note also that all who look (in faith) to the Son and believe shall be resurrected to life.

John 12:39-40, " For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn--and I would heal them."

Note here that God's Sovereign hand is so active that He even deadened the hearts of many of the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day. Ultimately, the bottom line, whether we like it or not, is found in Psalm 115: 3.

"Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him."

We can fight Him and impose our views of justice upon Him, or we can recognize that:

Isaiah 55:89, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Here is another clear verse on election:

NIV Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Note the cause and effect relationship here. Luke is very careful to say that the result of being appointed to eternal life was believing, not the other way around. This helps reinforce the sequence Paul sets forth for us in the Ephesians 2 reference above.

Note in the text below that those who came to Christ were those, "who by grace had believed." This implies that we who believe did so because God's undeserved grace caused us to believe!

27 When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those **who by grace had believed**.

NIV Romans 11:5-7

“So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then? What Israel **sought** so earnestly it did not obtain, **but the elect did**. The others were **hardened**...”

This passage distinguishes the believing remnant of Israel (Messianic Jews or “The Israel of God”) from the non-believing Jews.

Note the believing Jews were chosen by God through His grace. Grace is the opposite of merit. When you accept the doctrine of election, you really learn how gracious Grace is. God literally does it all; the good that appears in our life flows from His grace. The Jews who believed did not deserve salvation anymore than those who did not. But they believed because God graciously softened their hearts and brought them to spiritual life.

Those who earnestly sought eternal life did not find it. But those chosen by God did. The others were hardened. Note that, in this text, God seems to be the hardener (note John 12:39-40 above).

Now if what I am saying is similar to that which Paul taught, you should be ready to make an objection that the Romans made to Paul’s teaching. You should ask, “How can God hold us responsible if He elects some and hardens others?” You should object, “That isn’t fair.” These are very close to the questions they asked Paul, which may mean I am saying what Paul said. **If, in your explanation of salvation, these questions would not arise, then you are not teaching what Paul taught:**

NIV Romans 9:14-16, “What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”

NIV Romans 9:19-24, “One of you will say to me: ‘**Then why does God still blame us?** For who resists his will?’ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory--even us, **whom he also called**, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?”

You know, I think we've got a match! Interestingly, Paul does not provide us with a satisfying answer; he merely reaffirms the reality of God's nature and ways. We do not have to like to the sovereignty of God to accept it.

Putting It All Together Sequentially

Here, then, seems to be the logical sequence of events:

(1) The Persons of the Trinity planned to glorify one another before creation (or time, for that matter). The plan was that the Son would become the "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Rev. 13:8)."

(2) God planned to create the world and mankind, and chose his elect beforehand (God did not "wing it" as things went along).

(3) God regenerates each of His elect children; at the point of regeneration, believers are already legally seated with Christ in heaven and have received the deposit of God's Spirit.

Afterward, these regenerate elect choose to repent and believe the Gospel (or believe the Gospel and repent – the order is debatable); those ordained to eternal life believe. Although this all may take place in a split second, there is a sequence of events here, causes and effects. Ideally, through proper teaching, the believer follows His Savior in believer's baptism by immersion.

(4) God keeps these elect saved and works in them both to "will and do of His good pleasure." He will discipline His elect when they stray; He will even take His elect home early (like Ananias and Saphira) rather than allow them to lose their salvation. God know the wheat from the tares, the seed that fell on the soil He prepared as opposed to the other soils.

Questions Raised By Election

As mentioned above, this doctrine raises many questions, most of which are fairly easy to answer. But the point here is that whatever questions are raised, this doctrine stands and all answers must be given in light of it. Although there are a number of additional verses we can use to bolster the argument for straightforward election, I think I have presented enough verses for the open-minded student of Scripture to consider.

So if salvation requires faith and repentance, then the elect will believe and have faith. If salvation requires faith, repentance, baptism, and skipping on one leg, the elect will do that.

This posture now gives us a less desperate, less panic-driven approach to investigate the Scriptures to see whether baptism is necessary for complete obedience or whether it is necessary for salvation, two very different though related questions.

Some super quick answers to a few of the questions that flow from the doctrine of election....

I am not going to attempt to back all these answers up with Scripture at this time, nor answer them more than briefly. My only purpose here is to show that there are answers, even though they may not all satisfy us.

Common Questions That Arise When One Embraces Unconditional Election

1. Q: Why witness?

A: (1) For the same reason we do anything – to glorify God. We offer Him a sweet sacrifice when we witness, whether an aroma of life or death (2 Cor. 2:15-16); (2) to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20); and (3) to be used of God and rewarded for the same (implied in Phil. 4:1). Indeed, many great missionaries (like William Carey, considered the first modern missionary) and evangelists and pastors (like Jonathan Edwards, Whitfield, and Spurgeon) believed in election (as did Augustine, Calvin, and Luther).

2. Q: Does man have a free will?

A: The Bible nowhere explicitly says man has a free will. I do think the Bible teaches that men are responsible for their actions, choices, and attitudes. But we certainly do not have a free will in the physical realm (I cannot float across the room, no matter how often I decide to do so), so it should not surprise us that we have freedom **only within boundaries** in the spiritual realm. J.I. Packer's book, Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God grapples with this issue. I prefer to use the term responsibility.

3. Q: If election and eternal security are true doctrines, then why not sin all you want? What restraint is there?

A: Our baptism indicates God's desire for our lives (see later under Romans 6), living the resurrection lifestyle. Although I prefer the term "Perseverance of the Believer" to "Eternal Security," the bottom line is the same: once GENUINELY saved, always saved. But, when viewed from a perseverance perspective, it presents a truer picture: a genuinely saved person will continue to believe and if he falls away from the Lord, he will return; the Lord would take him home to glory before He would allow the errant one to lose his salvation.

Because a man or woman is elect, he is she is given a new nature that *predisposes that person to seek and serve God*. Additionally, assurance of salvation is partly based upon lifestyle. Believers who are not living for the Lord *could and should* question the genuineness of their conversion (see 2 Cor. 13:5) and Peter admonishes the believer to, "be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). God is sure, but our lifestyle and pattern of growth assures us.

So part of being a genuine believer IS the motivation to walk with the Lord. On the fear side, we can fear the discipline of the Lord, which is no pleasantries, and we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ in which every work will be evaluated. This, however, will not determine heaven or hell (lost people do not appear at the judgment seat of Christ, but at the Great White Throne), but rewards and review are in mind. But the real motivation is a positive one: the implanted desire to glorify God as a result of the Law of God written on our hearts.

There are other motivations besides fear of not “making it to heaven.” As a matter of fact, if salvation were properly taught and an individual truly believes, that fear should forever be gone, at least that’s what I understand Hebrews implies:

2:14-15. “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

Those believers who recognize God’s Sovereign grace do not live life in the fear of death. The fear they have is displeasing their master, being saved, but so as “by fire (I Cor. 3:15),” and the chastening hand of God.

4. Q: Isn’t the quality of spiritual life better for Arminians?

A: I do not think so, at least, not in my personal observation. I think there are lost people who think they are saved and hide behind eternal security just as there are Arminians who avoid serving the Lord because they want to wait to the end, or who are “in and out” of the kingdom. Just as children tend to turn out better when they know their parents accept them, despite their infractions, so, I believe, God’s children work best from a perspective of acceptance. Fear of hell does restrain some sin, but, if one stops there, the deeper motivations of the child of God are never realized, and these other motivations (mentioned above) are stronger in the long run.

4. Is Old Testament salvation that different from new?

Nicodemus, A Teacher of the Jews Who Should Have Known About the New Birth...

John 3:1-21 is a frequently quoted text by Bible-oriented Christians:

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, **so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.**"

Nicodemus was not just a devout Jew; he was a Rabbi who was also part of the "ruling council" known as the Sanhedrin. **It is worth noting that Jesus expected Nicodemus to be familiar with His teaching that a man must be born of water and the spirit. This implies that whatever Jesus taught was also seen in the Old Testament.** Hence we know that water here does NOT refer to baptism, for believers were not baptized in Old Testament times.

The key to unlocking this mystery is the fact that both the Old Testament Hebrew word (ruach) and the equivalent New Testament word (pneuma), can mean "spirit" or "wind" or "breath" (you might recognize the term "pneumonia"). The context determines whether the term is translated "wind" or "spirit" or "breath." Jesus uses this play on

words by saying that whom the Spirit regenerates is unpredictable because the “wind blows where it will.” He adds, “so is everyone who is born of the wind” (or spirit).

Here are the passages I believe Jesus expected Nicodemus to recall, passages that deal with being born of water and/or wind:

Ezekiel 36:25-27 “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Ezekiel 37:9-10 “Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.”

Also in Ezekiel 18:31, we read, “Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?”

Of King Saul, we read in 1 Samuel 10:6, “The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person....”

Of course one point in Jesus’ explanation is that it is out of the hands of man to be born again, but is as mysterious as the wind and rain. It takes a sovereign act of the sovereign God to work the miracle of regeneration. That’s why John writes, in the prologue of his gospel, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, *nor of human decision* or a husband's will, but born of God”(John 1:12-13).

Now if Jesus taught that baptism WAS necessary to salvation, and this was before His resurrection, then the thief on the cross could not be said to have been saved because He lived before Christ arose. You can’t have it both ways.

Paul’s Arguments Become Meaningless if People Were Saved Differently in the Old Testament Than the New (Romans 3-4).

Under the Old Covenant, animal sacrifices could avert the wrath of God physically and outwardly so that the people of Israel could become “clean” to participate in Israel’s religious life and festivals. The sacrifices could not cleanse the inward man, but simply covered (the idea of the Hebrew word kippur, atonement) over sin. *To put it in slang terms, it kept God from zapping them like He zapped Uzzah for touching the Ark.* The modern Jewish skull cap (kippa) is based upon the same concept: the covering hides man’s sinfulness from God. As Hebrews 10:4 tells us,

“because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

Impossible means just that. Although not all saved people understood as much as Job, the basis of their salvation was still the work of Christ. Job 19:25-27 reads:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

The sacrifice of Christ, on the other hand, not only covered sin, but it washed sin away. Jesus presented His sacrifice to the Father as an offering for all our sins for all times (see Hebrews 9:12-15, 24-28).

Most Israelites were not concerned about being “clean” on a daily basis, since their eternal destiny did not hinge upon ceremonial cleanliness. Instead, they were concerned about ceremonial cleansing when it became necessary to participate in a community religious event. Their salvation hinged upon being rightly related to God through faith, as Paul expounded.

Salvation can be divided into two segments: **objective** and **subjective**. Objectively, salvation was provided when Christ bore our sins on the cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God. He offered Himself to the Father on our behalf (see Rom. 5:8-10, I Cor. 15:15, and Hebrews 9:11-15).

On this matter, conservative Roman Catholics and conservative Protestants tend to agree. Luther and Calvin rightly understood that the Catholic Church was right about a number of things, including the nature of the atonement.

Where Luther and Calvin disagreed with Catholicism was in the realm of *Subjective* Salvation (the technical term would be Subjective Soteriology). Luther and Calvin understood Paul’s arguments in books like Romans and Galatians, to the effect that salvation was by faith (*personal trust*) not the practice of religion (including rituals and good works). Catholicism said salvation came by grace, but grace was measured out by the church through an ordained priesthood in small allotments through the seven “sacraments” and other works of piety.

Paul’s argument in Romans 3 and especially 4 and Galatians is that **God has ALWAYS saved people the same way, by faith** (in contrast to works or rituals). That the intellectual content of faith between Old Testament believers and New Covenant saints differs is obvious. But the subjective element, forgiveness and salvation by faith (which is often linked to and inclusive of repentance) has remained constant.

Note these early verses of Romans 4

1. What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?

2. If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God.

3. What does the Scripture say? "**Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.**"

4. **Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.**

5. **However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.**

6. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7. "Blessed are they whose *transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

8. Blessed is the man *whose sin the Lord will never count against him.*"

9. Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.

10. Under what circumstances was it credited? **Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!**

11. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.

12. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Note in this text that both David and Abraham were forgiven or declared righteous (justified) by their faith. Rather than God counting our sins against us, He counts us as righteous.

Where do rituals come into play? Again, Paul is clear: the ritual follows the justification. In the case of Abraham, he was justified first, while still uncircumcised. But because he was saved, he now wanted to follow the Lord and therefore obeyed the command to practice circumcision.

Abraham was justified before God when he exercised faith and justified in the eyes of others when he obeyed. I would suggest the same holds true with baptism. We are saved when we believe, but we are recognized by the church community and society at large as a follower of Christ when we submit to baptism.

Interestingly, in Muslim countries, converts to Christianity are not persecuted until they follow the Lord in baptism (any mode). In the early church and anywhere where Christianity carries a price tag, baptism communicates identification with the faith of Jesus Christ; the individual moves from a seeker to a finder to an outward profession of faith.

But back to our subject. Why does God ALWAYS save by grace through faith? The underlying issue is related to "why anything?" The big picture answer is "to glorify God" (see Appendix). Only salvation by Sovereign Grace through faith can bring maximum glory to God.

Sovereign Grace means God gets 100% of the credit. Faith is the ultimate way to glorify God, since it focuses upon the very nature and character of God. Faith affirms that God is faithful, dependable, gracious, good, and keeps His Word. Unbelief is the opposite of glorifying God, for it calls His very character in question.

Dr. Ron Moseley, in his book, Yeshua, A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church (Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore, 1996) comments on pages 70-71,

“The notion that the grace of God originated with Paul is not only wrong, but shows a grave negligence on the part of the Church concerning its roots in Jewish history and faith. Abundant records, written in Jewish literature before the time of Christ, speak of the grace of God as the sole means of salvation. The Thanksgiving Scroll (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls) is an excellent example. It declares, ‘Only by your goodness is man righteous or justified and by the multitude of your mercy...and by your magnificence you have glorified him.’ How much more clearer could it be than when this scroll says, ‘By Your grace You did save my soul, for from You is my step’? The scroll also says, ‘And all the sons of Your truth You bring forgivingly before You to purify them from their sins by the plenty of Your goodness and the multitude of Your mercies to make them stand before you forever.’”

5. The Jewish understanding of baptism.

The Common Rabbinic Understanding

In first century Judaism, gentiles who were wicked and unrepentant (the vast majority) were called goyim, gentiles. Those who wanted to be saved and believed in the true God were called “fearers” (the Hebrew term means foreigners living in the land); these repented of their sins and believed in the God of Israel as the only true God. They were considered forgiven and heaven-bound by the Rabbis, and were expected to keep the 7 Commandments implied within the Covenant of Noah (Genesis 9:1-18), including: (1) no idolatry, (2) no incest/adultery; (3) no murder; (4) no blasphemy/misusing God’s name, (5) no theft; (6) practice justice toward others, and (7) no eating flesh with blood in it or cutting flesh from a living animal.

If they wanted to become fuller converts (but not full) to Judaism, they could become known as “God fearers.” They would keep the 7 commands of Noah, practice the Sabbath, eat kosher, and participate in synagogue discipleship.

Lastly were the Proselytes (the “righteous foreigners”) who did all the above plus observing circumcision and mikveh (baptism), practicing Temple sacrifices, tithing, etc..

Baptism was considered the initiation into the religious community, thus placing the converts under the Mosaic Law, the priesthood, and rabbis. They were not identified as part of the community of Israel until they were baptized; *they were considered saved earlier, as “Fearers,” when they turned from their sins to the true God, **NOT** when they*

were baptized. Baptism was the identifying ritual initiating them into the privileges and responsibilities of keeping the Law.

(for documentation, see, Fischer, John, (editor), The Enduring Paradox: Exploratory Essays in Messianic Judaism, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Baltimore, 2000, pp. 174-178.

Since Judaism was well known throughout the Roman world (and gentiles by the drove were being converted to Judaism in the first century), this understanding of baptism was common then. It was, I believe, carried over into the church's understanding.

John's Baptism

“Baptism” comes from the Greek word “baptizo,” meaning “to immerse or dip.” We understand the Scriptures to teach that believers in Christ are to be immersed in “the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Although baptism may be the formalizing of conversion, we believe individuals are saved at the point of belief.

Here is some interesting material from Brad Young's book, *Jesus, the Jewish Theologian*, pp.15-16:

“In the Jewish teachings of the Mishnah, living water—defined as rivers or seas—was the highest grade of cleansing for ritual immersion (m. *Mikvaot* 1:6). The person was required to be immersed in living water which could be collected from rain or rivers. ... It is ... significant that the Dead Sea sect required religious purity before baptism. The individual seeking baptism was required to turn from wickedness before entering the waters of ritual immersion. Repentance preceded baptism in the Dead Sea community.

John the Baptist employed the same standard. The one who desired baptism was required first to turn from sin and then approach the waters with a pure heart. ... Josephus explains that in John's teachings repentance purified the soul while baptism cleansed the body. Josephus remarks concerning John the Baptist:

For Herod had put him (John the Baptist) to death, though he was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in baptism. In his view this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior.

John called on the people to practice piety and pursue a lifestyle of right conduct. The center of John the Baptist's activities was located close to the geographical area of Tel Qumran and near the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Moreover, John's theological understanding of baptism seems to be similar to the approach taken to the ritual immersion practiced by the Dead Sea sect. Was John a member of the Dead Sea community? ... No. ... He did not stipulate that they sell all their possessions and join his group of disciples who waited for the last days in the wilderness. Instead his

prophetic message implored the people to live a holy life in the mainstream of society. The religious mindset at Qumran could not tolerate John's approach."

Jesus' teachings often paralleled and agreed with those of Hillel. So in first century Judaism, a gentile would be considered saved apart from becoming a FULL Jew, but could be a God-fearing gentile (like Cornelius). When he wanted to become a full convert, the ritual necessary to welcome him into the Jewish community was baptism (by immersion). (See also Yeshua: A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church by Ron, Dr. Moseley, Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1998)

6. Jesus Example of Pronouncing People Saved Apart from Baptism and The Multitude of Passages Which Declare Salvation is By Faith (Belief)

Baptism was available then, but Jesus did not require it of those He pronounced "saved" or "forgiven" by faith as a condition.

Take Luke 7:47, where the sinful woman had washed Christ's feet with her tears:

- 47. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."
- 48. Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."
- 49. The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"
- 50. Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Notice that Jesus pronounced her forgive and saved by faith.

In Mark 2:5, Jesus said this to the man lowered from the roof:

- 5. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Note that this forgiveness was in response to faith, not baptism.

In the parable of the sower, in Luke 8:12, we find why people are not saved when they hear the word: they do not believe:

"Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."

Another key verse comes from Luke's Gospel, 23:39-43:

“One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"

We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, **today you will be with me in paradise.**"

It seems clear that this thief was going to join Jesus in paradise, apart from being baptized. Since baptism was in fact being practiced by Jesus and His disciples. John 4:1-2 reads:

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples...

So the argument that things changed regarding baptism after the resurrection does not -- excuse the pun -- hold water.

John's Gospel is considered the simplest Gospel to understand. It presents the salvation message repeated. Unlike the three other Gospels (called the "synoptics," i.e., "with the eye together—through the same eyes"), John presents the message to readers *without* an Old Testament/Jewish background. Hence he makes the message clear to those without a first century Jewish background – readers like us!

Note some of these verses (with my comments in italics and brackets) that say it is belief (faith) in Christ that makes a person right with God (forgiven, saved):

John 3:14-21, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up [*the atonement on the cross*], that everyone who **believes** in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world [*the first time*] to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever **believes** in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" [*here we see that God works repentance and prepares one to receive salvation; man does not prepare himself*].

Just before resurrecting Lazarus, Jesus said this in John 11:25-26, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. **He who believes** in me will live, even though he dies; and **whoever lives and believes in me** will never die. Do you believe this?'"

Note Jesus did **not** say, “whoever lives and believes in me **AND** is baptized.”

The Emphasis of the New Testament

John, in John 20:31, reveals his theme and purpose for writing his Gospel account:

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Now it might be argued that John expected believers to follow the Lord in baptism. I concur that he did. But it is nonetheless believing that results in life through His name.

In Acts 15:9, during the Jerusalem council, Peter says the following when referring to the conversion of the gentiles:

“He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.”

The heart is purified by faith; he does not say, “faith AND baptism.” Where these believers baptized? Absolutely. But when were they purified? When they exercised saving faith.

Paul summarized the call he made while preaching evangelistically in Acts 20:21, “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

The relationship of repentance to faith is simply this: one cannot be saved unless one wants to be saved, but saved from what? From sin and its consequence: a severed relationship with God and eternal separation from God. The desire to be saved from sin IS repentance (see a more detailed discussion in the appendix 5).

When Paul recites his calling to King Agrippa, he quotes Christ as follows in Acts 26:17-18,

“I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them, to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place **among those who are sanctified by faith** in me.”

Paul argues repeatedly that it is faith (believing, the Greek word, *pisteuo*) that justifies (makes one legally righteous before God) and saves the believer. Other writers also make similar comments. Here are many simple and succinct statements that claim it is through faith (believing) that we are saved/forgiven/justified:

NIV Romans 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, **a righteousness that is by faith from first to last**, just as it is written: “The righteous will live **by faith**.”

NIV Romans 3:22-23

22 **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ** to all who **believe**. There is no difference,

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

NIV Romans 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through **faith in his blood**. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--

NIV Romans 3:26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies **those who have faith in Jesus**.

NIV Romans 3:27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that **of faith**.

NIV Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified **by faith apart from observing the law**.

NIV Romans 3:30 since there is only one God, who will justify **the circumcised by faith** and the **uncircumcised through that same faith**.

NIV Romans 4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, **his faith is credited as righteousness**.

NIV Romans 4:9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's **faith** was credited to him as righteousness.

NIV Romans 4:13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes **by faith**.

NIV Romans 4:14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,

NIV Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

NIV Romans 5:2 through whom we have gained **access by faith** into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

NIV Romans 9:30 What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, **a righteousness that is by faith;**

NIV Romans 9:32 Why not? Because they pursued it **not by faith** but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone."

NIV Romans 11:20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and **you stand by faith**. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

NIV Galatians 2:16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but **by faith in Jesus Christ**. So we, too, **have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ** and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

NIV Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, **I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me.

NIV Galatians 3:8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles **by faith**, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

NIV Galatians 3:11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, **"The righteous will live by faith."**

NIV Galatians 3:14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that **by faith** we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

NIV Galatians 3:22 But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being **given through faith in Jesus Christ**, might be given to **those who believe**.

NIV Galatians 3:24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be **justified by faith**.

NIV Galatians 3:26 You are all sons of God **through faith in Christ Jesus**,

NIV Ephesians 2:8-10

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--

9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

NIV Ephesians 3:12 In him and **through faith** in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

NIV Ephesians 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts **through faith**. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

NIV Philippians 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but **that which is through faith** in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

NIV 1 John 5:4-5

4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, **even our faith**.

5 Who is it that overcomes the world? **Only he who believes** that Jesus is the Son of God.

NIV Romans 4:23-25

23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone,

24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us **who believe in him** who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

NIV Romans 10:9-11

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," **and believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 **For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified**, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

NIV 1 Corinthians 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached **to save those who believe**.

NIV 1 Timothy 1:16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example **for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life**.

NIV 1 Timothy 4:9-10

9 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance

10 (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, **who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe**.

NIV Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, **but of those who believe and are saved**.

NIV 1 John 5:13 I write these things **to you who believe** in the name of the Son of God so that **you may know that you have eternal life**.

Of course, the classic proof that baptism is not absolutely necessary for salvation is the "Thief on the Cross" who was never baptized:

Luke 23:39-43 is most significant; it reads:

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.

But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. "

Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, **today you will be with me in paradise**."

Drawing An Inference

If it is argued that there was no “Christian” baptism during Jesus earthly life, then we end up with a predicament where the very Savior of the world does not demonstrate proper evangelism for the church era He was about to found. That there is a difference between God’s dealings with Israel and the Church seems clear enough to me, but Jesus DID say He was about to build His church and He did train His apostles to lead that church.

What did change after Pentecost was the believer’s relationship to the Holy Spirit and the whole concept of the body of Christ. But the Savior has always saved people through faith apart from works or rituals.

An area for further exploration is the validity of the baptism of the apostles before the baptismal formula was given (in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) after their profession. We end up with a bunch of unbaptized apostles (except Paul), because they knew John’s baptism. Yet there is no record of the Apostles or the 120 being baptized on or after Pentecost. Of course, this is an argument from silence, but we have to wonder why the apostles were not re-baptized as were some of those in Acts who only knew John’s baptism. We have no record of Peter, for example, being baptized AFTER his confession that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

7. Passages pro and con: in the hermeneutical trenches

In this section, I will attempt to address a number of verses that are used to promote the idea that baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation. Again, I will remind readers that I do agree that it is God’s will for every believer to follow the Lord in believers’ baptism by immersion after a confession of faith. That is not the issue here. I do not view baptism as optional, but rather as distinct from regeneration and salvation. It is, in my opinion, the formalization of conversion.

When you have the firm foundation of a Sovereign God who chooses His elect (apart from any foreseen response in them) and guarantees their conversion and final destiny by His side, you are free to examine verses from a different perspective. If you conclude that the real issue is glorifying God, and that God is not desperate nor helpless and that neither the flow of human history nor the population of heaven are dependent upon man’s fickleness, it affects your entire outlook.

Rather than being obsessed with “holding out” and “making it to heaven” (a phrase, incidentally, never found in Scripture), you can press on because you know God and are securely in relationship to him. The key term moves from “salvation” to “maturity in Christ.” Heaven, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and our adoption into God’s family are seen as several among the many consequences of being rightly related to God.

Acts 2:38

Acts 2:38 is perhaps the strongest text used to promote the idea of baptism as necessary for salvation, so I will begin there.

36"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

37. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38. Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

40. With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

41. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

42. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Some interpretational debates center on the word, "for," which represents a translation of the Greek preposition "eis." Rather than haggle over how "eis" should be rendered, I would prefer to leave the Greek alone and simply follow the common translation, "for." It is not that the argument for translating "eis" as "because of" has no merit; I simply do not view it as the crux of the argument.

The Great Commission is often considered the "marching orders for the church." **The concern of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) is not seeing people saved; it is, rather, making mature disciple, which begins with salvation.** This was the emphasis of the early church; getting saved was a key step in the discipleship process, not the final product.

And that was the focus of Acts 2:38. Those who focus more on getting to heaven rather than becoming mature Christians may experience a paradigm blindness that reads material into a text. This is true with all theological positions, including my own, and we should be alert to this tendency in our attempts at interpretation.

If we understand Peter's main concern on Pentecost was making disciples **who would go on to maturity**, not merely seeing people saved, it changes our perspective in contemplating his preaching.

The question in this text is NOT specifically about salvation, but rather what God expects these repentant Jews to do. They have realized that they have crucified and rejected the Messiah in Acts 2: v.22. "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

23. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

24. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

32. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

36. "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

37. **When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart** and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

What does God expect from them at this point, in light of their previous rejection of Jesus? Remember, the concern of the Great Commission is not primarily seeing people saved; it is producing maturing disciples (who observe all things). Note the Commission in Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Salvation -- which is by grace and apart from anything that can be "done" -- is merely phase one. God's will for us is never merely phase one! When we are disciples who have been taught and actually observe "all things," then we have arrived at maturity, which is a separate (but interrelated) issue from salvation.

The "forgiveness of sins," which we can roughly equate with salvation (they are not exactly one and the same, though closely related) is not the main issue here; forgiveness is, in this text, a consequence of knowing and following Christ and righting the wrong of rejecting Him by fully accepting Him.

Because they are told to do two things (repent and be baptized) does not necessarily mean that both of those things are *absolutely* necessary for the forgiveness of sins. That is not the issue under discussion. The issue is "what should we do?"

If the question were, "What are the minimal requirements for one to go to heaven at death?" that would be a different story. But that is not the nature of the question.

When the specific question related to salvation is asked in Acts 16:31 (by the Philippian jailor), namely, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer is given specifically, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." We later learn that he and his family, were, in fact, baptized, because that is what God wanted them to do in addition to being saved (and it still is what God expects believers to do). But the answer to the more specific question, the minimal description of how one can be saved, is to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Not "believe and be baptized."

Note that this text nowhere discusses what would happen to an individual who believed in Christ but was not baptized. It could also be argued that baptism, in this instance, was a test of the sincerity of repentance. Although the Bible does not directly answer the question, "Is baptism absolutely necessary to salvation?" it does frequently answer the question of how a person could be saved. If the overwhelmingly vast majority of texts clearly do not include baptism as a salvation requirement, then that question, to my way of thinking, is answered. We will enumerate some of those texts later in this document.

But first, we can find a relevant passage (for comparison purposes) in Romans 10:9-10:

9. That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
10. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.
11. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Note in this Romans passage there is no mention of baptism. Note in the Acts 2:38 passage, there is not mention of "confessing with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord.'" And, in the Romans passage, we could argue that a mute (someone who cannot speak) or paralyzed person could never be saved. Even though he could confess Christ through sign language or writing, the text does say, "with his mouth."

The Romans passage, like the Acts passage, does not deal with someone who believes but does not confess with his mouth. If you believed in your heart, you would be considered righteous, but if you did not confess with your mouth, we could argue, you would not be saved. So fine situation this is: righteous before God but not saved? No, I don't think so. The issue of what happens if you believe in your heart without confessing with your mouth is not addressed here. But we are told that if we believe with our heart, the result is righteousness. This parallels in many ways our passage in Acts 2.

Also note that most of us would agree that someone who confessed with the mouth Jesus as Lord but did NOT believe with the heart is clearly lost. So most of us would agree that someone who is baptized apart from repentance and faith would be lost. This further highlights the concept found in both Old Testament and New, that it is the heart that matters, but that the heart shows itself outwardly. Incidentally, we'll save the thief on the cross for later.

So we might also conclude that it is possible to be a secret believer (for a time; I do not believe this can be permanent). Take Joseph of Arimathea in John 19:38; he was a secret "disciple," which means he was a follower of Christ. Yet he was NOT publicly declaring his faith. Yet the text presents him as a good man and a believer. John 19:38 reads:

"Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away."

We see the same situation in Acts 2, the idea of repentance (turn from sin and turning toward Christ) and baptism (publicly confessing Christ). But what saves a person is being rightly related to Jesus Christ, of which both baptism (when understood as a clear command of Christ) and confession with the mouth are evidences. But it seems Joseph was saved, even though he did not confess with his mouth.

Now if one holds to an Arminian viewpoint and a Campbellite viewpoint at the same time, you can see that if one lost his salvation and therefore becomes unregenerate, he would logically have to be baptized again to restore his salvation. If you

concluded otherwise, then either it is impossible to lose one's salvation or baptism is not absolutely essential to the new birth.

Question: Why wasn't this question in the early church raised in Scripture: "Is baptism essential to salvation? Can one be saved without being baptized?"

Answer: This question was probably not raised because the early church was concerned with making disciples, not merely seeing people saved from hell. Since baptism is a necessary part of discipleship, the question of when the threshold of salvation occurred was not a concern.

Another possible answer was that this matter was made clear by the Apostles and their teaching. For example, Paul seems to state in Eph. 2 that believers were born lost in sin, that God resurrected them spiritually (regeneration) as a sovereign act, and one result of this quickening (regeneration) was faith in Jesus Christ followed by a life of good works (2:8-10).

What has made the issue more complicated is the debate over mode and time of baptism. Since the apostles could authoritatively tell the early church, "baptism by immersion after faith," anybody that truly wanted to serve Jesus Christ would naturally follow Him in baptism.

When false modes (sprinkling or pouring) and erroneous timing (infant) for baptism came into play, it confused the New Testament pattern. So now we have people who view themselves as baptized because they were sprinkled as a baby. If these individuals come to trust in the work of Jesus Christ for their salvation but retain their erroneous teaching about baptism's mode and timing, are they truly saved? The early church never had to address this issue because of the presence and authority of the apostles at that time and the Jewish tradition of baptism that was well established.

Mark 16:9-20

Mark 16:9-20 are verses left out of the earliest manuscripts. Although it is possible that this text was in the originals and left out, I tend to "camp" on the shorter readings, recognizing at the same time that those questionable verses might, in fact, be the Word of God. I have included the NIV introductory note:

9. [[The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.]] When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.

10. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping.

11. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

12. Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country.
13. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.
14. Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.
15. He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.
16. **Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.**
17. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues;
18. they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."
19. After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.
20. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

I will address this section because it might actually be legitimate Scripture. I appreciate the teaching of these verses because it makes my point exactly: the Bible labels a man lost NOT because he hasn't been baptized, but because he hasn't believed.

The promise that "he who believes and is baptized will be saved" is just as firm as, "whoever does not believe will be condemned." If, as Campbellites assert, this verse teaches that only those who believe AND are baptized are saved, we now have to come up with some sort of limbo or purgatory for those who are "not condemned" because they are not unbelievers, but have not been baptized and are therefore not saved. So we have an in-between category sandwiched between those who are saved and those who are condemned, "Not condemned but not saved." Yet, if we use the same logic that the proponents of Campbellism use, this is indeed where we are left.

If people were labeled "saved" in Mark's Gospel without baptism, then, in a sense, the question is answered by precedent in the Gospel itself. Is there such the case? How about Mark 2:5, where Jesus said this to the man lowered from the roof:

5. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." No mention of baptism here. So, based on previous precedent in the Gospel of Mark itself, the example was set that baptism and salvation are two separate but related issues, and that the forgiveness of sins is possible by faith apart from baptism.

1 Peter 3:20-21

Peter's verse is the key to unlock the entire issue. 1 Peter 3:20-21 is making a comparison to Noah and his family being saved in the ark through the flood of water in the context of an involved passage:

“... who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--**not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.** It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”

On the one hand, Peter clearly states that baptism saves a person, but then he backtracks and makes it clear that it is **not** the ritual of baptism that actually saves a person, but the *repentant attitude* of the person who submits himself to baptism.

Here we see evidence for the argument that the term “baptism” is often used for the whole process of conversion, with baptism being the “formalization of conversion” as it was considered in first century Judaism.

JUST AS SACRIFICES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT COULD NOT CLEANSE THE SOUL BUT MADE ONE CLEAN FOR COMMUNITY LIFE (Heb. 10:4, “because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”) AND PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF ISRAEL, SO BAPTISM CANNOT CLEANSE THE CONSCIENCE OR SOUL, BUT WAS USED BY THE CHURCH TO DETERMINE WHO WAS RECOGNIZED AS “CLEAN” AND OPEN FOR FULL PARTICIPATION WITHIN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY.

Like Psalm 51, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ...” so Peter tells us that what happens on the inside before baptism is the real issue, but baptism is crucial for the believer because it “saves us” on the outside (i.e., the church now recognizes the believer as one of their own and we are categorized among those who profess to follow Christ).

Acts 8:15-17

15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit,
16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Acts offers very little consistency at all regarding the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the Holy Spirit came upon people when they believed, before they were baptized (see Acts 10:44ff below), other times when they were baptized, and other times when the apostles laid hands upon them. *This is one reason I think it is foolish to build a paradigm upon the book of Acts, unless the paradigm is that there is no consistent paradigm!*

Since Acts is a book of transition, these passages can be explained in great detail, but I will not dive into that here. But note my logic:

- (1) Only saved believers possess and are baptized by the Spirit;
- (2) If there is one instance in the book of Acts where people receive the Holy Spirit before they are baptized, then they were saved before being baptized and the matter is settled;
- (3) There is such an instance,

Acts 10:44-48:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

The instance of the salvation of the thief on the cross apart from baptism coupled with the instance of Acts 10 makes an awful good case for salvation apart from baptism, at least in my book.

As a matter of fact, the book of Acts minimizes water baptism and exalts Spirit baptism:

Acts 1:5 reads, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 11:16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

It is Spirit baptism that uniquely distinguishes the believer from others, not water baptism. Anyone can baptize with water, but only the Savior can baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 22:13-16

NIV Acts 9:9-19

9 For three days he [Saul] was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,

19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

Now for a second account at a later time:

NIV Acts 22:13-16

13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.

15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.

16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

This passage seems to imply that Saul washed away his sins through baptism and is a formidable argument for the Campbellite view.

Note the following:

Before Saul receives his sight, Ananias refers to him as "Brother Saul," an implication that Saul is already saved. The earlier account reads: 17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,

This raises the question of when the Holy Spirit came upon him. The most natural understanding would be that this occurred when Ananias placed his hands on Saul and the scales fell from his eyes, before he was baptized. Those two inferences (Brother Saul) and receiving the Spirit would lead us to believe Saul was already saved.

Yet the second passage seems to say that it was not until his baptism that Saul's sins were washed away, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

One solution offered by we non-Campbellites is to associate the washing away of sin with the phrase, “calling on his name.” The Common Greek of the first century was filled with participles (unlike English, participles in Greek include our English gerunds and sometimes even commands).

We could easily understand this as, “be baptized, “and “wash your sins away (by) calling on his name,” two separate acts. This is a very legitimate possibility grammatically and has its merits.

I prefer to believe that Saul was already truly “Brother Saul” before his baptism and had received the Holy Spirit when Ananias laid his hands upon him. Again, I prefer to think of baptism as the outward formalization of his conversion, much like the Lord’s Supper does not re-create Calvary but pictures it. Baptism washes away our sins in the same way that the bread is Christ’s body and the cup His blood; it pictures what has already transpired. Paul’s baptism was the confession of his faith and outwardly identified him with both the Lord Jesus Christ and the Church. He was taking a stand for Jesus. Paul was converted on the Road to Damascus, but his salvation was formalized (certified) through baptism.

Romans 6:3-4

“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

This passage is understood by some to refer to Spirit baptism. I do not think that is the most natural understanding, and I would add that many people miss the point Paul is making completely.

Because salvation does not depend upon our works, the question is logically raised, “Shall we sin that grace may abound?” If God is glorified by saving us graciously, then why not sin like crazy so God can forgive us more and He receive more glory? The question makes sense.

Paul’s answer is not that we can lose our salvation (which is what an Arminian would answer), but that we were buried with Christ in baptism.

When we go into the water, we are buried with Him. When we come up, we are resurrected with Him. We are, therefore, committed to living a resurrection life.

Paul’s point is this: we know it is not God’s will for us to live in sin because God makes it clear through the ritual of baptism. What is missed by most is the idea that our baptism is a constant object lesson that our old life is to be buried and we are to live as a new creation.

That baptism symbolizes these things becomes quite clear because the whole passage is not to be taken literally. We are not LITERALLY buried with Christ, nor did we LITERALLY come back to life with Christ. We may be legally (in God's eyes) buried and resurrected with Christ, but literally it did not happen this way; we were not even born.

Still, it could be argued that this legal or positional death and resurrection with Christ, though non-literal, is affected by literal water baptism. **I would argue that baptism is for our benefit and for the church's, not for our relationship to God.** We are buried, visibly, through baptism. We are resurrected, visibly, through baptism. When we are tempted to sin that grace may abound, we look at our baptism. *It is a forgotten tool in our war against sin.* We saw earlier in Ephesians 2 that God regenerates us before we believe and so that believe. The Spirit, like the wind, blows where He wills and causes the elect to be born again (John 3).

Like Old Testament imagery and rituals, there is a distinction between substance and image. Human beings are image oriented, and we need something tangible to hang on to. The New Birth is invisible, so is the baptism by the Spirit; but water baptism is visible and can be etched on the mind.

8. Can people who believe that “one has to be baptized in order to be saved” be themselves regenerate, since they are trusting in a work (Christ plus something else)?

Is this like the Galatian Judaizers who had “fallen from grace” because they added circumcision to the Gospel?

This is a tough question indeed. At times like this, I defer to the doctrine of election. How clear of a Gospel is needed for a person to be saved? I think the elect can accept Christ and still be somewhat confused or, better yet, inconsistent. I have often wondered how saved people can remain within Catholicism, for example, with its bowing down to images and offering prayers (and other acts of worship) to Mary. These things are so overtly wrong in Scripture, yet I am convinced that there are many believers within those ranks as well.

I think there are people who somehow trust in Christ and not their works to make them right with God in both of these groupings, sometimes despite what they are taught. There is often a difference between what people agree to and what they really believe, deep down (what I call the funeral home test).

9. A correct presentation of salvation

I have demonstrated the wealth of verses declaring faith (belief) or faith and repentance as the grounds for salvation and contrasted them to the small number of verses used to support the idea of faith plus baptism as the grounds for salvation.

Is God intentionally misleading people with the very Gospel emphasizing personal salvation, John's Gospel? Yet that Gospel states time and time again that it is faith that saves us.

Here is a copy of my explanation as to salvation (right off our church's web page):

How To Be Saved

To be saved means "to be delivered or rescued." In this context, we are talking about being delivered from sin and its penalty. Simply put, to be saved means to be right with God, the consequence of which is eternal life in heaven.

We are born separated from God and lost in our sins. Shortly before Jesus was born, an angel appeared to Joseph and said, "...you shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who will save his people from their sins..." (**Matthew 1:21**).

To be saved means to be transferred from God's disfavor to God's favor. It means becoming part of His Kingdom. It means a new, God-centered life. It means escaping the fear of hell and obtaining the assurance of heaven.

How Can We Be Saved?

In order to be saved, we must:

- 1. Want to be saved. This is called repentance. To repent means to change one's mind. If you want to be delivered (saved) from a sinful, self-centered life and you want God to work in your life, you are well on your way.**

"Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away..." (**Acts 3:19**)

This does not mean you must reform your life to be saved. It does mean you want God to reform your life. You are open to His working. God is no longer an enemy to keep at bay. Instead, He becomes the center of your life.

Repentance, as a change of mind, can occur in a split second (even though God often prepares a person over time).

- 2. Understand the basis of salvation: the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus is both God and man. The Bible says, "Unto us a Son is given, and his name shall be called, 'Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace....'" (Isaiah 9:6).**

Jesus came to die on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. He died to pay our penalty so that God could forgive us.

"...Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures..." (**I Corinthians 15:3**) "...Christ died for us. How much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." (**Romans 5:8b-9**)

After Christ died, He rose again, evidencing that He is the Son of God and that His payment for sin was effective.

3. **We must depend upon what Christ did for us to make us right with God. A check is only "potential" until it is cashed. The work of Christ is only "potential" until we believe. He died for everyone, but only those who exercise faith experience the benefits of Christ's sacrifice.**

We cannot obtain God's forgiveness by living a good life or by doing our best. No one does his or her best all the time anyhow. Besides, we already owe God everything—how can we give Him more than our all?

Good works or rituals cannot save us.

"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy..." (**Titus 3:5a**)

To be saved, we must stop trying to earn salvation. Jesus Christ is the Savior. He saves. He does not help us to save ourselves. He does the saving!

"...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved...for whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved..." (**Romans 10:9,11**)

Would you like to call upon the Lord for salvation, to hold God to His Word?

You might want to pray this model prayer:

Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I cannot make up for my sins. I believe Jesus died as the sacrifice for my sin. He paid my penalty through His death on the cross. I believe He rose again. I want to be saved from my sins. I now claim the promise of forgiveness and eternal life through my Savior. By faith I claim the salvation you offer. Thank you for saving me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

If you understood and prayed that prayer in sincere belief, you have begun a relationship with the God of the Universe that will last forever. Begin reading your Bible (start with the Gospel of John), and let us know of your decision. E-mail us at church@highlandpc.com

Appendix 1: The Importance of Theology Proper to All Other Subcategories of Theology

Man-centered Theology or God-centered Theology? We often build theology around our needs and aspirations; in the Bible, God is the center. We therefore need a proper perspective as to Who God is and what He is like.

Human Reasoning and Rationalism: Although Some Spiritual Men are Arminian, The Natural Man Is **Always** Arminian. This does not necessarily in and of itself make the Arminian position incorrect. But it does mean that, if the Calvinistic position on salvation is correct, it will not necessarily sit well with us.

Every Religion, except for my understanding of Biblical Christianity, believes one can lose one's salvation and that works earn (or contribute toward earning) salvation. It is only conservative evangelicalism that teaches otherwise. It is unnatural to believe what I believe. This does not prove I am right, but it should make the reader think.

The next two appendixes lay a bit of a foundation for "letting God be God." They are, I am ashamed to admit, my sermon outlines! I've done enough work already, buddy!

Appendix 2: The Immutability and Aseity of God

The Immutability of God
(topical)

Intro

1. When it comes to matters of theology, most dictionaries do not recognize the vocabulary.
2. Take two words we will use today: aseity and immutability. Only my large 3 volume dictionary has those words. You can check yours when you get home.
3. But why do we use such words? To impress people (who are we impressing)? To keep theology from average Christians? No.
4. We use these words to save breath, in the name of efficiency;
5. Aseity means that God is self-derived, self-sufficient, and independent of His creation. He depends upon us for nothing, and we cannot alter Who He is. This leads us into today's subject.
6. Today's topic will focus upon the immutability of God.
7. These matters are all being challenged today; we Christians need to decide whether we believe in the clearly infinite God of a Scripture or the toned-down, weak versions of God

being proposed today on all fronts, within and without evangelicalism. You need to pay attention to what you are hearing in this series, because you need to know what and why you believe what you do; it will be challenged, eventually even by people who will attend this church.

There are people out there today, claiming to be Christians and many claiming to believe the Bible, who would challenge every one of my main points today.

8. Immutability sounds bad. If someone called you immutable, you might punch them in the nose. The truth is that this mysterious word is true only of God.

9. To be immutable is to always be the same, unalterable. God is unchanging and unchangeable. James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

10. We can insert the word "always" to highlight this truth. God is always holy, always sovereign, always good, always wise, always just, and always gracious. Whatever God is, he always is. His nature is an always nature. He always is Who He is.

MAIN IDEA: The Immutability of God Explains Why We Can Depend Upon God, and Why God is Worthy of Our Worship and our Submission.

TS-----God's immutability extends to many areas. Let's look at a few key areas in which God is immutable.

I. God Is Immutable In Regards to His Very Nature: He is Like A Rock

1. Most changes are for the better or worse

2. God is perfect; perfection cannot be improved upon, therefore if God changed, it would have to be a change for the worse

(1) the Christian life involves change; we change as we are conformed to His image .but His image does not change

(2) people who are not wanting to grow and change have a problem, often insecurity; but if God changed, that would be a problem

3. That God does not change in His substance is clear in Scripture:

NIV Psalms 102:24-27

24 So I said: "Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations.

25 In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

26 They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded.

27 But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

NIV Malachi 3:6 "I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

4. Even during the incarnation, God remained the same in substance, the nature of God remained the same, though His plan unfolded and a new phase of it was initiated

Bill Irwin, a man who is blind, has a talking computer he uses to study the Bible. He's had a few chuckles over some of the pronunciations. "For a long time," Bill says, "the computer pronounced Holy Bible as "holly bibble" until I figured out how to modify it." But there was one thing Bill couldn't change. The computer uses the Spanish pronunciation for Jesus Christ--HEYsus Krist. "The programmer is Hispanic," Bill told me with a smile, "and he made sure that HEYsus Krist cannot be altered."

I like that. It reminds me that among the things in life that can be changed to suit my taste, one remains tamper-resistant--I can't change Jesus.

5. One frequent picture of God is a Rock. Although technically rocks can wear away from tides and currents, they are about the most unchangeable and dependable objects we encounter. Since God is the same, He is truly a Rock upon which we can build.

NIV Psalms 18:2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

NIV Psalms 40:2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

MAIN IDEA: The Immutability of God Explains Why We Can Depend Upon God, and Why God is Worthy of Our Worship and our Submission.

II. God Is Immutable In His Purpose and Wisdom

1. Although God seems to change His mind when interacting with people, He does not. First, let me present some clear verses that state that God does not actually change His mind:

NIV Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

NIV 1 Samuel 15:29 He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

NIV Psalms 33:11 But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

NIV Isaiah 46:10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

NIV Romans 11:29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

2. Now the immutability of God has often been defended in one breath but denied in another; example: replacement theology teaches that God is done with Israel forever, even though God has made it abundantly clear that He has plans for Israel in the end times. Others say that homosexuality is permissible in our age and on and on...

3. There are verses that make it look like God changes His mind, but they are examples of God relating to men as though a man

NIV Genesis 6:6-7

6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

7 So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth--men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air--for I am grieved that I have made them."

NIV Exodus 32:14 Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Jonah 3:10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

4. This is technically called *Anthropopatheia*, but casually referred to as condescension. According Ethelbert Bullinger in his classic volume, "Figures of Speech Used in the Bible," anthropopetheia is, "the ascription of human passions, actions, or attributes to God." Bullinger adds, "The Hebrews had a name for this figure, and called it *Derech Benai Adam*, the way of the sons of man."

5. For example, we read about the mighty hand of the Lord, or His eyes that see all, His ears that hear all, his smelling the sweet savor of a sacrifice, using the earth as His footstool, or of God girding up His loins.

So the text describes Him as changing His mind. What this really means is that God changed His attitude in response to man's change toward Him; this does not mean that God was surprised, or that He altered His plans. His plans, rather, took into account what He knew would happen.

6. Malachi 3:6 "I the LORD do not change

MAIN IDEA: The Immutability of God Explains Why We Can Depend Upon God, and Why God is Worthy of Our Worship and our Submission.

III. God is Immutable in the Realm of Knowledge

1. God cannot learn something: He is perfect in knowledge; He has all knowledge (omniscience), not just the knowledge of what happened, but also exactly what will happen.

2. He cannot be taken by surprise: He knows the beginning from the end

NIV Psalms 139:4 Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

NIV Deuteronomy 31:16 And the LORD said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them.

NIV Genesis 15:15-16 (to Abraham)

15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.

16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

3. You need to remember that time is a created entity. Imagine an ant farm under glass. A man moves around it and observes it at all levels because he is outside its realm. Now picture that ant farm as all creation at all points in time; the man represents God who is totally unbound by it.

4. If God did not know what was going to happen, He would not have all knowledge and would Himself be subject to time, therefore time would be Sovereign over God!

5. A pastor friend had an associate on staff. He was ministering to a lady who had been through a tragedy. "God did not know this was going to happen"

(1) we do not have to like the way God does things

(2) but we enter the realm of heresy when we try to make Him more palatable; God is NOT palatable to the unregenerated person; "there are none that seek after God" (i.e., the TRUE God)

(3) never apologize for God, and never alter God to soothe yourself or others; get angry at Him if you must, but do not pretend Him into something else

6. Isaiah 46:10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

MAIN IDEA: The Immutability of God Explains Why We Can Depend Upon God, and

Why God is Worthy of Our Worship and our Submission.

CONCLUSION

1. Is your God unchangeable? Is He limited in what He knows? Does He make plans at the last minute, reacting to all the surprises that come His way?

2. Or is He high and lifted up, exalted. Can we agree with God's Words in Isaiah 55:8-9:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

3. Or is your God easy to understand, just a slightly inflated version of yourself?

Appendix 3: WHY WE EXIST: TO GLORIFY GOD

MAIN IDEA: **Glorifying God is central to everything about everything.**

TS----- Today, I will try to offer Scriptural evidence that leads us to believe that the purpose of God's Creation, His Choice of Israel, and the Church primarily exist to bring glory to His Name, that glorifying God is indeed the big, overall category under which all the pieces of the puzzle are given meaning. Then I will show how Glorifying the Name of God is the foundation of prayer and the plan of salvation.

There is no verse that says, "All creation exists to glorify God." I do think we can, nonetheless, offer a strong argument that creation does exist to bring glory to God. See if you agree with me after reading my sermon outline and the texts spelled out.

I. All Exists To Glorify God

Romans 5:2 "through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in **the hope of the glory of God.**"

1. God is not "co-dependent" (He does not have an empty love tank)

2. Glorifying God means acknowledging and in some way displaying His splendor.

3. Psalm 19 begins with creation in general and then focuses in upon us as individuals.(turn there)

Psalms 19, "The heavens **declare the glory of God**; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

(1) this idea of declaring God's glory: before the angels, before the Persons of the Trinity

(2) John Piper writes,

"if God wants to love us infinitely and delight us fully and eternally, he must preserve for us the one thing that will satisfy us totally and eternally; namely, the presence and worth of his own glory. He alone is the source of full and lasting pleasure. Therefore, his commitment to uphold and display his glory is not vain, but virtuous. God is the one being for whom self-exaltation is an infinitely loving act" (Pleasures of God, p. 282).

(3) We, as individuals, glorify God by our words and thoughts! (Psalm 19:14)
---the real battle is how well we glorify God----

4. Let's look at why God choose Israel

Isaiah 43:6-7, "I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth-- everyone who is called by my name, **whom I created for my glory**, whom I formed and made."

Isaiah 60:21, "Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, **for the display of my splendor**."

Isaiah 61:3, "and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of

beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD **for the display of his splendor.**"

5. Let's look at why God chose us

Ephesians 1:5-6, "he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--**to the praise of his glorious grace,** which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Ephesians 1:12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might **be for the praise of his glory.**

6. Let's look at why God keeps us saved:

Ephesians 1:14 [The Holy Spirit] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--**to the praise of his glory.**

7. Let's look at why God the Son created all things, why the human nature of Christ was holy and pure, and why Jesus is the head of the church:

Colossians 1:16-18, "For by him all things were created [God the Son]: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church [Jesus]; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, **so that in everything he might have the supremacy.**

8. God is not some reactionary weakling, panicked and taken by surprise, desperately trying to control people through threats and zappings, frantically trying to fix a creation defiled and diseased by sin..

He warns out of goodness, He had a plan for redemption before the world began. This drama called life is all part of that plan. The purpose of it all: to bring Him glory and to include others in celebrating and acknowledging His wonderful nature.

Revelation 13:8, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

Glorifying God is central to everything about everything.

II. Glorifying God Focuses Upon Bringing Honor and Fame to His Name

1. There are so many verses about this:

1 Samuel 12:22 **For the sake of his great name** the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, **that you may declare the praises of him** who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

2 Samuel 7:23-26, "And who is like your people Israel--the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and **to make a name for himself**, And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, **so that your name will be great forever**. Then men will say, 'The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!' And the house of your servant David will be established before you."

Romans 9:17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and **that my name might be proclaimed** in all the earth."

Isaiah 63:11-14, "Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people-- they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people **to make for yourself a glorious name**."

Ezekiel 39:25 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will **be zealous for my holy name**.

Isaiah 48:9-11, "**For my own name's sake** I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. **How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.**

2. Our prayers and arguments before God should argue the case of glorifying His Name (in Jesus' Name)

Joshua 7:8-9, "O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. **What then will you do for your own great name?**"

Psalms 25:11 **For the sake of your name**, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is

great.

Psalms 79:9 Help us, O God our Savior, **for the glory of your name**; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.

3. Forgiveness and evangelism are for His Name's sake

1 John 2:12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven **on account of his name**.

Psalms 23:3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness **for his name's sake**.

Romans 1:5 Through him and **for his name's sake**, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem **for the name of the Lord Jesus**."

3 John 1:5-8, "Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.

They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was **for the sake of the Name** that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

Glorifying God is central to everything about everything.

III. Salvation Was Brought About In A Way that Glorified God

1. Romans 3:21-27, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

2. No human effort = God gets all the glory!

Most of us know Ephesians 2:8-9, but we forget, "lest any man should boast."

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

Glorifying God is central to everything about everything.

CONCLUSION

1. Glorifying God is what it is all about.
2. Evangelism, discipleship, worship, conducting our family life God's way, employment, culture, arts, hobbies, sports, health, education --- all those things should be submitted to the greater task of glorifying God..
3. We should not confuse WAYS we glorify God with the overall AIM of glorifying God in all we do"

Appendix 4: The Integrity of A Written Doctrinal Position

When so many people and groups claim to believe the Bible, their claim tells us little. For example, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, and Seventh Day Adventists all claim to believe and align themselves with the teaching of Scripture.

If we are to truly discuss and even challenge one another's convictions, it is important to be upfront about them. This is only one reason why a written doctrinal statement makes sense. It is not enough to say, "I believe the Bible." That communicates very little. When I hear something like that, I think, "These folks are so embarrassed about what they believe or uncommitted to a set of beliefs, or they have such little unity that they want to conceal their beliefs."

Although this may not always be true, it often is the case. Written doctrinal statements are helpful communication tools, and they proclaim, "When we say we believe the Bible, we have concluded that the Bible teaches...."

We all have to draw the line as to where heresy begins. Better to do so upfront with a written statement than through a silent code. It is a matter of integrity.

Appendix 5: The Nature of Sin: Sins of Commission, Sins of Omission, and the deeply rooted problem: deceitful and desperately wicked hearts

Why Arminianism must take a shallow view of sin

The viewpoint that we have a completely free will and that we can attain sinlessness in this life often (not always) flow from an Arminian viewpoint. So is the viewpoint that a regenerate person can lose his salvation through sin or a series of sins. I have many objections to the Arminian perspective, one of which is the downplaying the nature of sin.

The idea that we can lose our salvation encourages a fake spirituality, legalism, and shallow doctrinal understanding because followers of this way of thinking are often obsessed with hanging onto their salvation.

Sins are therefore often called, “mistakes.” Sin is also defined in a shallow fashion. For example, I can do a good deed for a wrong reason (to manipulate someone, for my ego, for my image or pride), thus polluting a good act with a sinful motive.

I do agree with some Arminians who recognize that all sins are NOT alike. Under the Law, for example, the penalty for some sins was death, for others a financial penalty, while other sins required only repentance and sacrifice. Although any sin would break the Law, which is an entire cohesive unit (see James 2:10, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it”) not all sins bear the same weight in Scripture (John 19:11 reads, “Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a **greater** sin”).

In I Corinthians 5 and 6, Paul lists the types of sins requiring church discipline, and in chapter 6 he lists the sins that typify the unregenerate, telling us that those professing believers who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Those of us who believe in salvation by grace and adhere to security argue that those whose lives are characterized by the sins of I Corinthians 6 are very likely not truly saved (not that a genuine believer cannot fall into serious sin for a time, but, like a boomerang, he will come back to repentance much like Peter after the Resurrection).

Nonetheless, the Arminian position looks at sins as wrong acts or (better) wrong attitudes and thoughts. The problem, however, lies much deeper.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

Jesus said, “For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’” in Mark 7:21-23.

We often are unaware of the many ways in which we sin. John 1:7 offers some interesting implications: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

If we are “walking in the light,” meaning living in fellowship with God, then the blood of Jesus “purifies us from all sin.” But if we are walking in the light, what sins are there that need purification? The best answer is that we sin in ways we do not recognize, even when our walk with God is at full force!

As our attitudes are contaminated by ego and the desire for control; our hearts deceive us and we lie to our own selves. We say we are not angry, just hurt when we are both. Although we receive a new nature when we receive Christ, we still battle our old nature, and it can be insidious and cause us to sabotage ourselves. Larry Crabb rightly points out that the biggest problem in marriage (and in any close relationship, for that matter) is “justified self-centeredness” (see Men and Women, Enjoying the Difference). Psychologists tell us we forgot almost all the wrong things we do, but we remember well the way others have wronged us. This is very much part of “deceitful heart syndrome.” This is why Solomon tells us, “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:26).

We must recognize that there are sins of omission (things I fail to do that God wants me to do) and sins of commission (lines I cross against God’s will). Those who believe in salvation by sin management usually downplay sins of omission. It is okay if I don’t spend time with the kids or do not take time to treat my wife with gentleness or offer her my time, but if I would swear I would lose my salvation. When God wills for us to do something and we don’t do it, that is every bit as much a sin as if He forbids us to do something but we choose to do it anyway. Failing to show love, for example, is a sin.

Another problem I have with the Arminian viewpoint is their selective use of Scripture. For example, if you could lose your salvation based on Hebrews 6, you could never be saved again. One thing is clear: whoever is being talked about here (a believer who loses his salvation or a fake believer) cannot be saved:

Hebrews 6:4-6 reads, “It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”

At the funeral home, every Arminian has somehow held onto his salvation, no matter what his lifestyle. The practical outworking of Arminianism is, “people I am not close to can lose their salvation, but no one near and dear to me will.” I have no problem with understanding Hebrews 6: such people are with God’s people, but not part of the elect. If they were, they could not have deserted the faith and wandered into apostasy:

“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (1 John 2:19).

If you had to be born again and again and again you should logically be baptized again and again and again. Some Arminians do practice this; most do not.

Arminians do not excel in godliness over others, as measurable by divorce rate, personal debt, church splits, and other quantifiable statistics. Fear IS one major motivator in life, but it can also inhibit a believer from growing. From a practical viewpoint, the threat of losing ones salvation, statistically, does not reduce divorce, poor money management, or poor child rearing.

Appendix 6: Collecting Criteria and Complicating Salvation: Where Do We Draw the Line?

Why do we draw the line at repentance and faith?

All of the following additional requirements could conceivably be added as requirements for salvation if the Bible is interpreted at a superficial level (rather than seeking to understand how the original audience would have understood these things):

1. Baptism (dealt with above)
2. Selling all one has and giving it all to the poor

NIV Matthew 19:21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

NIV Mark 10:21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

NIV Luke 12:33-34

33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Like the baptism passage, the question, “What happens to someone who doesn’t sell all his possessions but follows Christ?” In the first two quotations, Jesus was exposing the covetousness of the rich young ruler; the latter is often considered an exaggeration to get His followers to look at life through non-materialistic eyes, not as a literal command.

Those who consider we who do not believe baptism is necessary for salvation (but recognize that baptism is necessary for obedience) are often accused of ignoring the plain meaning of the text. Okay, let's see those who so accuse explain the texts above and explain why they do not make it a requirement for salvation. When they do so, they will sound a lot like the rest of us!

3. Exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees,

Matthew 5:20 could be easily construed to be an additional requirement of salvation:

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Although some Pharisees were hypocrites, most were very devout and sincere, like Paul the Apostle, as he himself describes in Philippians 3:5-6, “...circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless...”

I think it would be appropriate to say that most Pharisees knew the Scriptures and had committed more verses to memory than almost all Christians in any denomination or belief system; they lived clean lives, were noted for family faithfulness and acts of charity and kindness. Like Paul, many of them passed the “legalistic righteousness” test; when they were measured against the law, they were not “high handed” sinners, and they followed the Law’s demands as far as atoning for their other (besides high handed) sins and weaknesses.

Although we tend to think of the Pharisees who hated Christ, we need to remember that they were the powerful and often corrupt version. Far more Pharisees were like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea than of the evil variety. Most followed the godly example of Hillel, one of Judaism’s great Rabbis who lived shortly before the time of Christ. Jesus’ teachings often parallel his. For example, Hillel said, “If you don’t want other people to do something to you, don’t do it to them” (the Golden Rule stated in a different fashion). For documentation, see the chapters about the Pharisees in Dr. Ron Moseley’s book, Yeshua, A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Early Church.

But is this what Christ is talking about? I think He is very clearly trying to wear people down to see how utterly lost and helpless they are. He actually intensifies the Law, showing us that we cannot find salvation through our works, no matter how hard we try. It is hopeless and vain, as Paul explains:

(Romans 7:14), “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” That is where Jesus wanted to get folks, I believe.

4. Submitting to the Lordship of Christ/taking up the cross daily

Like many of the things mentioned before or after this point, it IS God's will for us to take up the cross daily (whatever that means) and submit to the Lordship (control and will) of Jesus Christ. But the question is, "Is my salvation dependent upon doing these things, or do these things flow as I grow after my salvation?"

If we must be willing to do anything God calls us to do in order to be saved (which is how living under the lordship of Christ is generally understood), then assurance of salvation is impossible. Yet, according to I John 5:13, we can **KNOW** that we have eternal life:

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know** that you have eternal life."

Please understand this point: I cannot possibly **know** that I would do any thing God led me to do *until* He actually asks me (and then I am tested). Peter, for example, thought he would never desert Christ. Note his words, "Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.'" (Matthew 26:33). Yet that same night he denied Christ three times before the rooster crowed.

All we can know is that we *want* to be willing to do God's will, but we cannot ever know *if* we would do ANYTHING God told us to do unless He tested us in *every* area.

5. If we state that obeying every one of the Lord's commands is necessary for salvation, then it would be easy to conclude that traveling as a representative of Jesus Christ to foreign lands was necessary for salvation, for Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore *go* and make disciples *of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Most of us understand this as a task given to the church at large, not each individual Christian. Still, it could be argued that there are no limitations here. If we are looking for a collection of specific criteria about how to be saved apart from the clear and oft repeated "believe," then this idea is certainly a candidate.

6. Speaking in Tongues. Although I am skeptical about Mark 16:9 ff, one could conclude that unless one spoke in tongues, he is not saved: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues..."

7. Picking up snakes. While we're collecting criteria, Mark 16 also says that..."...these signs will accompany those who believe... 8. they will pick up snakes with their hands..."

8. Drinking poison (no, not your wife's coffee!), While we're collecting criteria, Mark 16 also says that..."...these signs will accompany those who believe... when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

9. Ability to heal others. While we're collecting criteria, Mark 16 also says that..."...these signs will accompany those who believe... they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

10. Working greater miracles than Jesus worked. John 14:12 reads, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

I am not sure I completely understand this verse's true meaning, but if I thought my salvation (which comes by faith) depended upon me working greater miracles than Jesus worked, I'd be in trouble. Yet because I believe in the oft repeated teaching that I am saved by faith in Christ, I know my salvation is secure whether I meet this condition or not.

I could go on and on, but here are just SOME other criteria that could be added: being perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect, holiness (perfection) without which no one will see God, undergoing persecution, pressing onward to attain the resurrection from the dead, being a peacemaker, cultivating meekness, receiving persecution, not eating meat sacrificed to idols, never eating food prepared with blood, no divorce or remarriage under any circumstances, receiving communion, must not be cowardly, receiving the anointing with oil and prayer from the elders, not committing the unpardonable sin, not calling a brother a "fool," and on and on it goes.

It seems to me a lot wiser approach to cling to the oft-repeated message of salvation by "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Once we are saved, "God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Faith is taking God at His word that, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life." When God GENUINELY saves a person, that person evidences fruit, by which they are known.

We must embrace principles of interpretation that seek the plain meaning of a text but avoids being infantile by jumping to conclusions.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for journeying with me through this theological trail. As I stated in the beginning, if I have not persuaded you that my viewpoint is the Biblical one, hopefully you at least realize that there are other perspectives which do attempt to uncover the original meaning of Scripture.

For others, I hope this paper and the Scriptures I have highlighted have stretched you. Understanding God and His ways is no small feat. The best of us can understand so little about God. We can only understand what He has revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29). Most of the time, His revelation is straightforward; in other instances, it gets tough.

Even if you embrace my views, there are many questions I left unanswered. Sometimes I have no answer. In many instances, I do have complete or partial answers, but, if I were

to address all common question, I would need to write a multi-volume set. Fortunately, there are books out there on some of these topics, and I would be happy to recommend them. For the most obvious set of questions (those involving man's limited free will/responsibility and its harmony with the doctrine of election), I suggest J.I. Packer's classic book, Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God.

Once again, thank you for joining me on this theological journey and giving my thoughts a fair shake.