

## Confusing Salvation with Discipleship — Review

The biggest problem we have as Christians concerning salvation is this issue of taking passages speaking of our spiritual life and confusing them with passages referring to our eternal salvation. The vast majority of error regarding salvation plus any form of works or losing your salvation can generally be traced to this problem.

1. Salvation is based on faith alone in Christ alone and NOTHING else is required, not any works before or after as proof are required. The Gospel of John makes this perfectly clear, as does passages such as Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:4-5.
2. To include any act by man beyond his expression of simple faith in the Cross is to add works and, therefore, not consistent with Scripture on the subject.
3. Salvation includes the following (among the 40 things):
  - God's anger is propitiated (satisfied) by the work of Christ on the Cross
  - Believing man's sins are forgiven — condemnation is lifted
  - Believing man is redeemed (purchased) from the slave market of sin
  - Believing man is reconciled and at peace with God
  - Believing man is justified and declared righteous
  - Believing man is regenerated — receives a human spirit generated by God
  - That human spirit is created perfect by a perfect God, rendering the believer a literal son of God
  - The righteousness of Christ is imputed to that human spirit
  - Eternal life is imputed to that human spirit
  - Believing man is positionally sanctified — set apart as God's own and forever identified with Christ (in Christ)
  - Believing man is said to be called (by God), and if called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified, with the original Greek saying "glorified" is so certain it is stated in the past tense as if it is already done, **precluding any possibility of the loss of salvation in the one called.** This Romans 8 passage alone proves you cannot lose your salvation.

- God does all this! Man only trusts in it.
- 4. If it were possible for someone saved to ever lose/forfeit his salvation, it would require the reversal of all the points above and no place in Scripture is such described.
- 5. The calling by God and the free gift or salvation are irrevocable (Rom 11:29).
- 6. That means there is nothing a saved believer can do to change what God has done or purposes to do.

We have been calling this “saved in the past tense” or being **delivered from the *penalty* of sin**. What comes after this point in time is experiential sanctification or what some refer to as simply “sanctification,” or being **delivered from the *power* of sin in the life**. It is our spiritual walk after salvation, sometimes called “discipleship” or being saved in the present tense. It is totally separate from salvation except that a person must first be saved in order to experience experiential sanctification.

The problem is we see terms like “fallen from grace,” “strayed,” do not “submit again to a yoke of slavery,” “shrinks back,” “wandered away from the faith,” “lose what we have worked for,” “that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit,” “to be lukewarm,” “depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,” or to not “hold fast to the word,” and it is presumed by some that these are all buzz terms for losing/forfeiting your salvation. We have already covered some of these and will address others in detail later.

Meanwhile, where is the authority to assume these terms refer to losing your salvation? If that is what they mean, then why didn’t the writer just say so? He didn’t because none of these terms mean that. In every case the writer is speaking of a damaged or substandard spiritual life that results from some human behavior. You can search the Bible and never find anyplace where it says outright that you can lose your salvation. If such were possible and as important as the idea is, wouldn’t you think that instead of speaking in code words with hidden meanings that God would have felt the need to clearly spelled it out in terms that we could all easily understand?

Instead we get poor translations and even poorer exegesis with attempts to make some term mean what the student wants it to mean, that you can lose your salvation, when it doesn't even suggest that. When the passages are studied in context, it becomes clear they are speaking of a damaged or even failed spiritual life. There are consequences for the believer in that condition, which includes often painful discipline and potentially even death, but it does not include the loss of one's salvation. When these passages are compared to the many passages that do clearly testify that it is impossible to lose your salvation, the expositor is compelled to seek an interpretation other than that you can lose your salvation.

We spent seven lessons developing biblical support for the doctrine of eternal security, and before we are finished we will spend at least four, probably five addressing incorrect interpretations of passages that some believe say you can lose your salvation. Yes, you have a free will and you can choose to ignore what the Bible says and continue to believe whatever you want to believe, but you will be held accountable for any such decision.

But no matter how you justify it in your own mind, there is no getting around the fact that if you add **anything** to salvation that **you must do or not do** to earn it or lose it, you are adding "works" to faith and thus following a system of salvation by works. If you believe **you** will never fail, without even knowing what is in your future, you are depending on self to be your own savior, not God. You can loudly proclaim that isn't true, but it is.

## Dealing with 1 John, GraceNotes #37 Dr. Charlie Bing

Interpreting 1 John is troublesome to some because of statements that appear to be tests or conditions. The prevailing view among commentators is that the purpose of these tests is to determine if someone is saved eternally or not.

Another view, not as common, is that the tests do not determine one's eternal salvation, but one's experience of fellowship with God. Are the tests of 1 John intended to examine one's eternal relationship to God or examine one's intimate fellowship with God? The answer has important ramifications for one's understanding of the gospel and consequently, one's assurance of salvation.

### The tests stated

The tests are spread throughout the epistle. Here are some examples of the conditions stated in these tests:

2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

2:9 He who hates his brother is in darkness.

3:8 He who sins is of the devil.

3:10 Whoever does not practice righteousness or love his brother is not of God.

3:14 He who does not love his brother abides in death.

4:8 He who does not love does not know God.

### The purpose of the epistle

Our understanding of the tests must agree with the purpose of the epistle. A number of times in 1 John we read "these things I [or we] write [or have written] to you..." (1:4; 2:1, 26; 5:13). It would be natural for any author to put the purpose statement for the entire book at the beginning (The references in 2:1, 26, and 5:13 seem to refer to what immediately precedes each of those statements). If so, then 1:4 declares that the **purpose of the book is to bring the readers into the full joy of a shared fellowship with the apostles and with the Lord** (1:4).

Fellowship (literally “sharing”) refers not to the establishment of a relationship, but to *growing more intimate* in that relationship. In other words, John’s purpose is not to establish a new relationship, but to enhance an existing one. It seems obvious that the readers already had established a relationship with John and the apostles, just as they also had established a relationship with God.

It appears John wrote to protect the readers’ experience of fellowship with him and his apostolic circle and with God because false teachers among them denied that the readers possessed eternal life (cf. 2:25- 26; 5:13), which of course would undermine any existing fellowship with the apostles and with God. The experiential tests then address the quality of this horizontal and vertical fellowship. But for assurance of their eternal life, John directs the readers to the promise and testimony of God (2:25; 5:9-12).

**1 John 2:25** And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

**1 John 5:9** If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. <sup>10</sup> Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. <sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

### **The readers addressed**

The existing relationship of John to the readers and their relationship to God are demonstrated in how John addresses the readers in endearing Christian terms. He calls them little children (e.g., 2:1, 18), children whose sins are forgiven (2:12), children of God (3:1-2), and fathers (2:13-14). John also includes himself with the readers in their common Christian experience (“we” in 3:1, 2; 5:14, 19, 20). The readers also had the anointing from God (2:20, 27). They already had a relationship with God because they had believed in the Son of God (5:13). Even in the statement of some of the tests, the saved state of the readers is indicated by the use of the Christian designation “his brother” (e.g., 2:9; 3:10, 14, 15).

## **A theological concern**

If John was making his readers' conduct the test of their salvation, then there is an unavoidable theological problem in that faith alone in Christ alone would not be the condition for salvation. **It would instead be faith in Christ plus confirmatory good conduct.** This of course compromises the gospel of God's free grace clearly taught in the Scriptures (Rom. 3:21-25, Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Salvation is either by grace through faith or it is by works, not by any mix of the two (Rom. 4:4-5; 11:6; 1 John 5:1) **Salvation conditioned on tests of conduct destroys the possibility of one's assurance of salvation.** When we look at the tests, we recognize that none of us keeps them all, or keeps any of them perfectly. As long as that is true, then doubts will remain about whether we are saved or not. Doubts in any relationship are incompatible with deeper intimacy in that relationship. For example, intimacy in marriage is built on the security of unconditional love and acceptance which encourages each spouse to open up to know the other and to be known. If John were posing reasons to doubt one's salvation, he would be defeating his purpose stated in 1:3-4 to enhance deeper fellowship with the apostles and with God.

## **References to intimacy**

When one recognizes John's purpose for writing, there is a rich reward. The epistle leads believers into a deeper more intimate knowledge of God. The terms which some regard as references to salvation ("in the light/in darkness, knows God/does not know God, of God/of the devil, abides in God/abides in death") should better be seen as references to a source or an orientation rather than an absolute state. It describes believers experientially rather than positionally. The tests let the readers know whether they are growing toward God in intimacy or heading away from Him. A more detailed explanation of these references must await a future study.

## **Conclusion**

The tests of 1 John address a believer's experience. If properly understood, they lead the readers into a more intimate relationship with God Who is already known through their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The book's purpose is not to establish their relationship with God, but to deepen the relationship that they already have. Taken in this way, 1 John does not lead

believers into insecurity about their relationship to God, but enhances their desire to be more intimate with Him.

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