

From Fear to Certainty

**A Handbook on
the Assurance of Salvation**

by Weston Street Bible Church

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I also want to thank Nick and Allison Borden whose ministry to the body of Christ is to continue to print these books free of charge. This enables our church to make this ministry free of charge as well.

Dan Lash
May 2021

INTRODUCTION

Those of you who have heard my salvation testimony know that the Lord allowed me to go through a great struggle regarding assurance of salvation early on in my Christian experience. I remember when I was going through it all, a kind lady took me aside in church and said, “Dan, I do not know why you are going through all this, but it is most likely that the Lord is preparing you for a unique ministry.” That lady was correct.

Most of the books which I have written have a common theme: helping people become established in the assurance of salvation.

If the devil cannot keep a person from being saved, he will attempt to keep that person from gaining assurance.

This book is written as a handbook because there are many misapprehensions about the way of salvation which the devil will use to keep a person in a perpetual state of uncertainty. Those lies of the devil usually fall into one of several categories:

- A confusion over the gospel message itself
- A confusion concerning the nature of saving faith
- A confusion over repentance
- A confusion caused by a respected religious leader having the gospel wrong
- A confusion created by false doctrine which has yet to be weeded out of the new believer's soul.

The devil wants to prevent the child of God from developing a steady assurance because assurance is the foundation to a fruitful service unto the Lord. It is impossible to witness with certainty and power when, deep down in your own soul, you are still wondering if you are even His child. Truly, if the devil cannot keep a person from embracing the gospel of grace to be saved, then his next goal is to attempt to keep that person from gaining a settled assurance.

The format of this book is a series of articles I have previously written on the topic of assurance. This book is an accumulation of lessons the Lord has taught me, through His word, concerning assurance, by allowing me to have grappled with these doubts. I have personally grappled with every doubt written in this book. So, rest assured; you are not the first person whom the devil has put through the ringer in attempt to keep you from experiencing the power of assurance.

Hopefully, this book will not serve simply as a crutch for you to reach for when you are struggling with doubt. I certainly do not want to be just another author to lean upon. After all, it is not the words of Dan Lash which will bring lasting victory of your doubts. It is, rather grace truth from the Scriptures, properly taught and understood, which the Holy Spirit will use to build lasting discernment concerning this issue.

Many of these struggles were personally experienced over 40 years ago in my life. As I am now in my 60s, I

thought I had better write about them while I could still recall most of them.

If you are a doubting soul who has struggled with assurance, hopefully at least one of these articles will be used by the Lord to deliver you from a misunderstanding concerning assurance which the devil has been using to keep you from moving forward. If I can do that for only one person, this book will have been worth the effort.

Dan Lash, May 2021

STRIVING FOR ASSURANCE

If you do not have a settled peace concerning where you are going to spend eternity; if you are not one hundred percent sure that, if you were to die today, you would go to heaven; then, at times, your faith may be in a flawed object. Joy and peace normally are the result of a proper alignment of our faith with God's grace. As we read in Romans 15:13,

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If this joy and peace are missing, it is because the Holy Spirit is not always bearing witness with your spirit concerning the focus of your faith. The Holy Spirit will not bear witness if we are harboring a false hope in our soul. He will not bear witness to a false object of faith. It is possible and, in fact, quite common, for the genuine child of God to have a real struggle in this area of assurance. Quite often, this is the case because, even after we have believed, there still may be false information in our souls that we obtained before we believed, false information which will take some time for God to remove. Not until these false hopes are weeded out of our souls, will we experience a settled joy and peace.

The primary source of these false hopes is, quite simply, wrong information concerning the terms upon which God grants eternal life. Most people, who are struggling with the assurance of salvation, are still wondering if they

have really done “their part” in this salvation thing. They are still wondering things such as, “Have I repented enough?” “Did I really believe?” “Was my faith strong enough?” This list of doubts goes on and on. Most of these doubts focus on the doubter’s personal performance; that is, “Have I _____?” (Fill in the blank). Such doubters, more often than not, are doubting themselves, not Christ.

Understand this: To doubt yourself is to have attempted to believe in yourself. This, indeed, would be a misplaced faith because nobody’s response to God is ever perfect. Such doubters are trying to be saved by believing in THEIR perfect response to God.

The good news for such doubters is that God has not called us to believe in ourselves. God has called us to believe in something done completely apart from ourselves. Christ, on the cross, has already settled our sin debt. He has already made our peace with God through the blood of His cross. God has called you to rest the eternal destiny of your soul in the sufficiency of HIS cross work for you, and not in your perfect response to Him.

We are not saved because we have a perfect faith; we are saved because our Savior provided to God the Father, on our behalf, a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Rest your hope, for all eternity, in that perfect sacrifice. Make the focus of your faith the perfection of His cross work, and watch your doubts about yourself fade away.

A COMMON SOURCE OF DOUBTS

Sometimes, there are more fundamental issues involving doubts, issues which involve our grip upon the gospel of grace.

From time to time, I am called upon to counsel people who are having serious struggles with the assurance of salvation. Usually, when I am dealing with such a person, the questions which keep haunting him or her look like this: “Have I (fill in the blank)?” “Have I repented enough?” “Did I really believe?” “Was I sincere?” The doubts go on and on.

Moreover, the doubts are merited; eternity is staring us all in the face and hell is real. So, we really have to get this thing right.

The real underlying problem with people who are struggling with such doubts is this: they are trying to believe in themselves. They are trying believe in THEIR own faith, THEIR own commitments. They are trying to make THEIR own peace with God.

God has not called us to believe in ourselves. Christ Jesus has made our peace with God through the blood of His cross. We do not satisfy God with our feeble faith; Jesus satisfied God the Father in our behalf when He went to bat for us on the cross and there, once and for all, settled our sin debt to God the Father’s complete, total and final satisfaction. You don’t attempt to satisfy God with your

sincerity; Christ Jesus satisfied God with His Blood. You don't rest the eternal destiny of your soul in your faith; God has called us to rest the eternal destinies of our souls in something outside of ourselves: where He rests, in the finished work of Christ.

Look away from self altogether and find in Christ the One who has already made your peace with God through the blood of His cross, and rest the eternal destiny of your soul in THAT work.

My Friend, if you are a doubting soul, stop trying to believe in yourself. God is not looking for merit within you. God is satisfied with Christ's cross work for you. Rest the eternal destiny of your soul there. Jesus has already satisfied God the Father's demands against your sin. Rest in Christ's sin-settling work for you.

DID I REALLY BELIEVE?

Another area of misapprehension concerning the gospel is the nature of saving faith. Many people whom I have counseled in the area of assurance have struggled and have had doubts about the SINCERITY of their faith. Did I really believe? Was my faith genuine? Or how about this one: did I believe with all my heart? The doubts go on and on.

How do we address such doubts?

These doubts all have one thing in common: They are doubts concerning the genuineness of one's faith. The person with these questions actually doubts himself, not necessarily Christ.

God has not called us to believe in our faith. People who are expressing such doubts concerning the genuineness of their faith are trying to believe in their faith which, of course, would be a misplaced faith. It would be faith in an act of believing instead of faith in the perfect offering of Christ.

Rather than believing in our faith, God has called us to believe in something outside of ourselves: Christ and His finished work for us. Faith doesn't make our peace with God; Christ made our peace with God through His sacrifice on the cross.

Faith is the proper of the soul seeking to latch onto something for assurance. When our faith latches onto false

hopes, such as our own faith, we will be plagued with doubts. But, when our faith looks away from ourselves altogether and latches onto Christ's once and for all sacrificial provision for us, then, and only then, can we begin to experience assurance.

Don't let the devil trap you in a vicious circle of doubt concerning questions about your faith; focus your faith away from yourself altogether, and rest your hope for all eternity where God rests, in the finished work of Christ.

It is a fact that Christ has made your peace with God through the blood of His cross, as we read in the second half of Colossians 1:20:

Colossians 1:20b: and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, **having made peace through the blood of His cross.** (*Boldface supplied.*)

Where there was tension in the Godhead over our sin debt, there is now the peace of the satisfied justice of God. God the Father is now satisfied with Christ's offering of Himself for our sins. As we read in Isaiah 53:11:

He (that is God the Father) shall see of the travail of his soul (that is God the Son on the cross), *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. (*Parentheses supplied.*)

God the Father is satisfied with Christ's offering of Himself for our sins as that which is able to merit an

everlasting relationship with Himself. All that God the Father asks of us is that WE are satisfied with that sacrifice of Christ in which He has already addressed our sin debt. Rest the eternal destiny of your soul in the sin-settling sacrifice of Christ. When you make that decision, God the Father sees that decision and declares you to be His forever child.

For those that struggle with the question of whether or not they have genuinely believed, notice that I have just explained to you the dynamics of becoming a child of God without using the words “faith” or “believe.” This is important for the person who is having doubts concerning his faith.

Don't get hung up questioning the sincerity of your faith. That is a trick of the devil to get you to doubt yourself and become introspective in regards to assurance. Don't wonder about the strength or quality of your faith. Ask yourself this question: Did Jesus really offer Himself as a satisfactory payment for my sin? Is God the Father satisfied with that offering of Christ for me?

If God the Father is satisfied with Christ's sin-settling sacrifice for you, will you be satisfied with it as well? Will you rest where God rests: in the sin-settling sacrifice of Christ? If your answer to God is yes, you have become His child.

THE VOCABULARY OF THE GOSPEL

In the Scriptures, there is a core group of words that are often used with which a person needs to acquaint himself if he would have a proper understanding of the plan of salvation. As a pastor, teacher and student of the Scriptures, this vocabulary flows off of my tongue, usually without regard for the fact that these words are unfamiliar to many. Since the purpose of Gospel preaching is to enable people to be able to believe the gospel, we need to define our terms. There are five core doctrines of the cross which revolve around six words: Redemption, Remission, Propitiation, Reconciliation, Peace and Justification.

Redemption

The word “redemption,” when used in the context of the cross, speaks of a release upon the payment of a ransom. That which is released is the barrier of man’s sin as that obstacle to the salvific (saving) will of God towards people. The ransom which Jesus paid on account of sin is universal in its scope; that is, it has paid for the sins of all men for all time. We can see that this is true in the verse below:

1 Timothy 2:6: who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

“Ransom” literally means “an instead of payment.” That is instead of a person having to suffer forever for his own sins, Jesus suffered for them **INSTEAD**.

Let us consider how the word redemption is used in the following context:

Hebrews 9:12-15: Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption

13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,

14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Notice that this passage describes transgressions as being redeemed. The transgressions of all men for all time were taken up and accounted for in the offering of Christ. The justice of God has been satisfied by the offering of Christ.

By the way, one thing we will notice in many of these passages is a contrast between the sacrifices of the law of Moses, as a provisional offering for sins, and the perfect sacrifice of Christ, which was God's once and for all solution for our sins. We see this concept twice mentioned in our above context. The offering of Christ in our behalf is

God's once and for all solution for sins, free for the believing.

Remission

Remission is the twin doctrine to redemption. The two terms are used together in several contexts of Scripture to refer to two aspects of the same event. Where redemption speaks of settling the issue of sin for all mankind, remission speaks of sending that issue away. In contrast to the provisional nature of what was accomplished by the sacrifices under the law of Moses, the offering of Christ is said to once and for all address and send away the issue of our sins. The contrast between the accomplishments of the sacrifices of the Old Testament and the perfect sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament is no better put forth than in the following context:

Hebrews 10:1-18: For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

3 But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of sins every year.

4 For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me.

6 In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure.

7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come -- In the volume of the book it is written of Me -- To do Your will, O God.' "

8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the law),

9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before,

16 "This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put

My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"

17 *then He adds,* "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

18 Now where there is remission of these, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.

Notice verse 18: Where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. This is because the offering of Christ for sin once and for all settles our sin problem to such a degree, that the issue of the penalty of sin never needs to be considered again.

There are two English words which are derived from this same Greek word for remission. The words are "forgiveness" and "remission." In fact, both words in our English translation are the identical word in the Greek. So, "remit" and "forgive" are words with identical meaning. The word "remit" means, "to dismiss or send away." Without exception in the Scriptures, that which is said to be remitted is sins.

The vocabulary of salvation does not indicate that people are forgiven when they believe. The sin debt of all people, for all time, was settled on the cross. The language of Scripture is such that, when a person believes in God's provision for his sin, he is declared to be in a right relationship with God because God reckons to him the value of Christ's finished work. Christ, on His cross, accomplished the remission (or forgiveness) of all sin, for all individuals, for all time. Christ has taken upon Himself, grappled with, and put away and settled, for all time, sins as being the barrier preventing God from making people His

children. Since that event, the barrier that prevents God from making people His children is no longer their sins, but rather their unbelief in that cross provision of God.

The remission of sins is a term used in the Scriptures to identify God's once and for all addressing of man's sin issue as contrasted to the provisional nature in which the law of Moses addressed the sins of the Israelites.

Redemption and remission, when considered together, reference the twofold event which would occur on the great Day of Atonement in the Old Testament.

Leviticus 16:15-21: " Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which *is* for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat.

16 "So he shall make atonement for the Holy *Place*, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

17 "There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy *Place*, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.

18 "And he shall go out to the altar that *is* before the LORD, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the

blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around.

19 "Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

20 "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy *Place*, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat

21 "Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man.

In this ritual, the concepts of redemption and remission are demonstrated. The substitute suffers for the sins of another and those sins are led away into the wilderness. Jesus is the fulfillment of this great Day of Atonement:

This why John the Baptist could introduce Jesus to His disciples as follows:

John 1:29: The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Also, this is why, in the book of Hebrews, we also read:

Hebrews 9:24-26: For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies

of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—

26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Understand this: the Lord Jesus has, on the cross, for everybody, already put away their sins as the barrier between them and God. The New Testament does not speak of the results of believing as getting one's sins forgiven. The forgiveness of sins is not the issue. Christ has already satisfied the divine justice of God against our sins through the blood of His cross. This satisfaction of divine justice is forgiveness or remission (since they are the same word in the Greek).

The result of the work of Christ on the cross IS the forgiveness of sins. The divine justice of God against your sins has been has already been poured out on your substitute: the Lord Jesus. The result of believing on Jesus is not forgiveness; but, rather, justification, as we read in Romans chapter 3:

Romans 3:24-28: Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his

righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

27 Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Propitiation

The root concept behind the doctrine of propitiation is satisfaction. The Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross, for our benefit, satisfied the righteous demands of God the Father against our sin. God the Father is now satisfied with the offering which Christ has offered in our behalf, and will forever remain so. There is no longer tension in the Godhead toward the sinner over that for which Christ has died. The satisfaction that Christ has rendered to the Father in us sinners' behalf concerning our sins frees God to take possession of the believing sinner.

1 John 4:10: Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 2:2: And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

Jesus is the satisfaction of Divine justice in behalf of each and every person on the face of the earth.

Isaiah 53:11: He shall see the travail of His soul, *and* be satisfied By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

Many people wonder about whether they have accepted Jesus as their Savior. What is important to understand is that God the Father has already accepted Jesus as your Savior. Christ has, on the cross, once and for all settled your sin debt to the Father's satisfaction. The satisfaction with which the Father views the offering of Christ for you can be your eternal standing before the Father, free for the believing. Rest the eternal destiny of your soul in Christ's sin-settling sacrifice for you. Be justified, not by your own works, but by the blood of Christ shed for you. God the Father is satisfied with Christ's work; you need to be, too.

Here is a passage which pulls together all the terminology we have looked at so far:

Romans 3:24-26: Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the restoration of an individual to a right relationship with God. Ever since the original fall of man, men have been alienated from God in every way possible. God is perfect in every aspect of His character; however, man, by nature, is repugnant to God in every aspect of his character. Because of man's sin and the repugnance of his character to God, apart from divine intervention, it is not possible for man to have a relationship with God. The good news is, because of the perfection of God's character, God has chosen to undertake to restore man unto Himself. This undertaking of God to restore us to a right relationship with Himself the Bible calls reconciliation.

There is a three-step process in the Scriptures through which God brings about reconciliation and they are identified for us in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20: And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

God has already taken the first step in the reconciliation process, as we can see in verse 19 of this context. God the Father transferred the penalty of all transgressions against His laws, past, present and future, to our substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. He died under the penalty of our sins to God's complete and final satisfaction. This act enables God to respond with salvation instead of with condemnation.

The second act of reconciliation is also on God's part and consists of the word of reconciliation going forth. God has committed to all believers the task of commending to all peoples' consciences, the message that God has already undertaken to secure their eternal well-being through the offering of Christ in their stead. Believers are to proclaim this good news that the Father has placed their sins upon Christ; and Christ has offered to the Father a satisfactory payment for those sins. This payment can be the sinner's standing before the Father, free for the believing.

The third act of reconciliation is on the part of man. The word of reconciliation is the message of the cross. That message illumines the conscience of the unbeliever to the all-sufficient work of Christ for them. When that message is understood, a person may, for the first time in his or her life, understand that God is a good God, who desires that person's eternal well-being even with his or her many sins. When the one illuminated by the message of grace rests the eternal destiny of his or her soul on the sin-settling sacrifice of Christ, he is, in that moment of time, declared by God to be His forever child. He is reconciled to God.

Peace

Where there was tension with God toward us sinners, because of our unsettled sin debt, there is now a Christ-brokered peace. There is no longer tension with God toward the sinner concerning that for which Christ has died. The only frustration that God now has with people is over the fact that they will not take the time to learn of His grace and believe it.

The messengers of God now proclaim the peace of a Christ-settled sin debt. The sin debt of all has been paid, God's justice is satisfied. Where was the tension of an unsettled sin debt, there is now peace.

Luke 2:14: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

God, in an act of good will, sent Christ into this world, to settle our sin debt. Christ has accomplished that on the cross and now there is peace towards the sinner, where there was formerly the tension of an unsettled sin debt. God is now just and the Justifier of the one who believes in Jesus (Romans 3:26) because divine justice was satisfied FOR ALL on the cross.

It is God who has taken the initiative, and has accomplished a solution for our sins, such that all people are now free to have a relationship with God, free for believing. Christ has made our peace with God. We enter into that peace by resting in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ for our sins as that which merits our eternal standing before the father.

That is what it means to believe.

Ephesians 2:16-18: and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

17 And He came and proclaimed peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

God's ministers today proclaim the peace of the satisfied justice of God, free for the believing.

Justified

The word "justified" means to be declared to be in an eternally right standing before God. When a person believes for himself the facts of the gospel, The Father declares him to be justified or righteous. By the way, in the Greek of the New Testament, the words "justified," "justification," "righteous" and "righteousness" are all basically the same word, differing only in spelling, depending upon their function in a sentence.

Justification is based upon the redemption that Christ has accomplished on the cross in our behalf and is appropriated by an act of faith. In an act of faith, the believing sinner receives the value of the finished work of Christ as the sole basis upon which he expects to be accounted eternally accepted before God. When the believing sinner commits this act of faith, God the Father

declares him to be in an eternally right relationship with Himself.

Simultaneously with this proclamation, the Father sends out the decree that this believing sinner is to be immediately and irreversibly born again. This new birth creates within the new believer a new person made in the image of God. It is this new person who will spend eternity enjoying the presence of God.

Let me close in this way: if you have never done so, and you, for the first time, have understood what Jesus has accomplished on the cross for you, tell God the Father that you accept a relationship with Him, based solely upon Christ's sacrifice for you. If you have, for the first time, understood and believed this message for yourself, you have passed from death unto life.

THE TRUE NATURE OF SAVING FAITH

People who are interested in being, or who want to be, or are saved, no doubt have heard of the term “saving faith.” In fact, they all hope that they have committed the act of saving faith. Those who have assurance that they are saved are confident that they have committed the act of saving faith; however, individuals who doubt their salvation, even if they are persuaded that true believers are eternally secure, are not entirely certain that they have committed the act of saving faith. It is to these uncertain people whom this chapter is designed to aid and address.

So, the question is, “Are you sure that you have committed the act of saving faith?”

To be quite honest, if you are asking yourself that question then, at this time, you have an incorrect concept of “saving faith.” True saving faith is not focused upon self; rather, a true act of saving faith is aware only of the object of that faith: the Person and work of Christ.

Saving faith is not aware of itself. Saving faith begins as an awareness that the Lord Jesus has completed a work on the cross which is all-sufficient to commend a person to an everlastingly right relationship with God.

When one is desirous of saving faith, he should not pursue an inward state of mind. He should, rather, seek to understand the extent to which the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to serve as the basis of a right relationship with

God. Many people who are struggling with assurance are attempting to “work up” a sense of faith within their souls. Moreover, when they perceive that they have achieved that faith, then they will seek to nail down that point of time as the exact moment when they were “genuinely saved.” Such assurance will last as long as they maintain that sense of faith. As soon as an anxiety arises in their soul and displaces their joy and peace, assurance goes out the window.

Genuine saving faith comes about as the soul, anxious for assurance, investigates the truth of the word of God associated with the gift of righteousness available because of the sacrifice of Christ. Following are a few promises from the word of God which address that gift of righteousness.

Romans 3:24: being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Notice, in the above passage, that a person is justified, or declared righteous by God freely by His grace through, or by means of, the redemption which the Lord Jesus has already accomplished. On the cross of Christ, the Lord Jesus answered the righteous demands of the Father against the sins of all men for all time. God the Father has accepted that payment and is satisfied with it. The satisfaction with which the Father views the redemption of our sins on the cross serves as the basis of an eternally right standing with God, free for the believing. When one rests the eternal destiny of his soul in that all-sufficient offering of Christ, the Father declares that individual to be righteous.

Romans 5:17: For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Notice that the righteousness of which a person needs to partake, in order to be accounted eternally righteous before the Father, is a gift, bought and paid for, through Christ's sacrificial offering for sin. When a person is willing to receive the merits of Christ's sacrifice as that which forever merits his relationship with the Father, the Father then, at that moment in time, declares that person to be righteous and immediately sends forth the command to regenerate him. This regeneration brings about a new person on the inside of the new believer, a new person created in the image of God, a new person who is now qualified to forever dwell in the presence of God.

Here is a fundamental principle of faith:

Romans 10:17: So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

The above verse means that faith is not self-generated; rather, the ability to believe is made possible by the words of God's illuminating the conscience concerning the all-sufficient nature of the sacrifice of Christ.

Here is a practical application to this reality of faith: The person who is struggling with regards to the genuineness of his faith, rather than trying to work up a sense of believing, needs to study from the content of

Scripture the extent to which the sacrifice of Christ has already addressed the issue of his sin. He needs to see that, regardless of a response of faith, the sacrifice of Christ has already settled the issue of his sin to the Father's satisfaction.

Regardless of whether a person EVER believes in Christ, it is a fact that Jesus has already settled the issue of his sin. Jesus has already made the sinner's peace. Jesus has already satisfied the divine justice of God for the sinner, WHETHER OR NOT THE SINNER BELIEVES IT. The blood of Christ has EFFECTIVELY removed the sin barrier for the sinner, even if he NEVER by faith avails himself of it.

Here are some verses which prove the above point:

2 Corinthians 5:19: that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Colossians 1:20: and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Hebrews 9:26: He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 9:12: Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 10:12: But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

1 John 2:2: And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Understand this: The Lord's death on the cross was for the purposing of closing the books on sin, and sins, as being the barrier to God's ability to take possession of the sinner. Faith does not complete that transaction between God the Father and God the Son concerning our sins; rather, faith avails itself of the merits of THAT completed transaction.

Faith does not make the gospel true; faith believes the true gospel. The Gospel is already true. It is a fact the Jesus, on the cross, has brokered for the sinner the peace of a satisfied Divine justice for his sins. Faith rests its hope for all eternity in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice as that which alone merits one's eternal standing with God.

We should also not view saving faith as the moral courage to trust God. Most people's concept of faith is that it is a courageous belief in God which defies the senses.

To that definition, let me say that we are not saved by courage. Nor are we saved by a courageous act of faith. We

are not saved because of an attitude of faith which we have successfully mustered up within our souls. If a person is trying to muster up saving faith within his soul, he has a completely wrong concept of saving faith.

Saving faith is not a commodity to be produced and bartered. Rather, it arises as the result of investigating the facts of the gospel of grace from the word of God.

Saving faith is an act of the will which is only possible as the Holy Spirit illumines the sin-hungry soul concerning the all-sufficient nature of the sacrifice of Christ. This is only possible when the sinner, who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, exposes his heart to teaching which addresses what was accomplished on the cross in his stead.

As a hungry soul is exposed to the life-giving seed of the Word of God, understanding springs up in that person's soul, an understanding which enables the individual to exercise positive volition towards the facts of the gospel. This act of volition, specifically, a decision to rest the eternal destiny of one's soul upon the facts of the gospel, is to commit the act of saving faith. However, before a person can commit that act of saving faith, his conscience must have been first illuminated by the power of a properly articulated gospel concerning the facts of what transpired on the cross.

Saving faith is an assurance that a person can now have an eternal relationship with the Father through the substitutionary, intercessory sacrifice of Christ. When a person is assured that this is true and, as a conscience act of

the will, accepts an eternal relationship with God based upon Christ's perfect sacrifice, God takes that person as His child, creates within that person a new man, gives him the Holy Spirit as his ever present divine teacher, and delivers him over to the safe keeping and advocacy of Christ.

WHAT ABOUT REPENTANCE?

The issue of repentance, and what part it plays in passing from death unto life, has been an issue in the church for about 40 years. Many a seeking soul has experienced years of turmoil wondering if, when he came to God, God had really accepted his repentance.

I remember wondering, very early on in my quest for assurance, whether I had repented enough. Had I really turned from every known sin? Had I really surrendered to the Lordship of Christ? Often, I would think of another sin which I had not yet left at the altar; so, the following Sunday, during the invitation, I would go forward again, hoping to turn from this newly discovered sin and finally gain that ever elusive assurance of salvation.

Of course, trying to find the assurance of salvation by a recognition that one had genuinely turned from sin is a recipe for a mental breakdown. Hell is hot, and eternity is forever, and I kept discovering sins in my life from which I had never repented. What about the pride of life? What about covetousness? What about lust? What about selfishness? It seemed that the more I tried to walk the straight and narrow, the more self-condemnation I experienced.

I remember that, when I was at Bible college and still struggling with this idea of repentance, my pastor gave me a book by Richard Seymour entitled, All about Repentance. While I am not sure that I read the entire book, I remember

that it immediately made sense that a gospel invitation which focuses on self-reformation is incompatible with grace. I realized that incorporating a prerequisite turning from sin into the plan of salvation was to add works to God's grace. Moreover, I realized that those who insisted on incorporating this step of self-reformation (repentance from sin) into the saving response to the gospel, they THEMSELVES did not understand grace!

The more I studied Scripture, I discovered that the real prerequisite to saving faith was not self-reformation; but, rather, a self-condemnation in which a person turns from any hope in his own righteousness and, instead, embraces a God-provided gift of righteousness: a righteousness consisting of God's own satisfaction with Christ's sacrifice for me, free for the believing. Once I became grounded in that truth, I then realized that those insisting on adding a prerequisite of turning from sin to God's grace, they THEMSELVES had the gospel wrong; THEY had not given up on a self-generated source of righteousness as that which could commend them to God. Those who insisted on adding turning from sins as a step to passing from death unto life did not themselves understand the way of salvation.

Believing that repentance from sins is the prerequisite to saving faith is having failed to have come to grips with one's own sin.

Romans 3:19b: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

The person still focused on all the sins from which he turned to be saved is still boasting about his own righteousness.

The Apostle Paul makes the following statement concerning a man's ability to reform his own flesh:

Romans 8:7, 8: Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be:

8 so then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

The mind of the flesh is the only frame of reference which a person possesses from birth. From the above context, we can see that it is impossible for an unsaved individual, possessed only with that fallen, human-born frame of reference, to produce within his person the righteousness of God. Yet, that is exactly what is being demanded of the hearer when the evangelist demands that he does what Scripture says is impossible to do: subject his mind of the flesh to the will of God. The unbeliever cannot cease from sinning to the degree which could please God because it is impossible for the mind of the flesh to subject itself to the law of God.

To define repentance as turning from sins as a prerequisite to saving faith is to introduce works and personal merit into the salvation formula. This is a rejection of the grace way of salvation.

As much as God wants a person to be transformed into a Godly, good-works-producing saint, becoming a child of

God is not about all the promises a person makes to follow Christ. It is not about cutting a deal with God at the mourner's bench, promising to be a good boy or girl from now on if only He will save them.

The deal is this: God sent Christ to this earth to pay for each individual's sin debt by allowing Jesus, instead of the individual, to be punished for his sins. Christ has already brokered a person's peace with God through the blood of His cross. As sinners, all are invited to rest their hope for heaven in His good work on the cross, and not one's own good works. That work which merits an eternal standing before God was finished on the cross and is not finished by a person's continued obedience. As Scripture teaches us in Hebrews 9:15, the invitation to believe on Jesus is an invitation to receive the promise of an eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 9:15: that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Likewise, in Hebrews 10:14, it is said that Christ has "through one offering perfected forever those who are being sanctified." Salvation is not about what a person is going to do for the rest of his life; it is about what Christ has already done about his sins on the cross. It not a person's life in exchange for his salvation, it was Christ's life on the cross. Nobody cuts a side deal with God at the foot of the cross. There are no side deals in which we offer a lifetime of obedience for the gift of eternal life.

For a complete study on this doctrine of repentance, get my book [Repentance: Transitioning to Grace](#).¹ It is a

¹ Available for free through Quik Reeds Ministry, or by download at www.WestonSBC.org

thorough discussion on this doctrine from the Scriptures. Since this handbook on assurance is meant to help the doubter and not thoroughly address a topic, we will not cover this topic in greater detail in this book.

THE FALLACY OF THE GOSPEL OF TOTAL SURRENDER

By total surrender, it is meant that, at the point of saving faith, the candidate for salvation is making a commitment to the Lord Jesus to completely enthrone Him as the Lord of his life, promising total obedience from that point forward.

Many groups that name the name of Christ make this at least a step, if not the key element, in Christian conversion. In fact, when such people discuss the persistent backslidden condition of a confessing Christian, they usually assign the reason for the backslidden condition to the probability that the person did not totally surrender when they were saved and, thus, are not saved. Of course, this “total surrender” places the proponents of this salvation formula into an elite class; they assume, quite smugly, that most people in their sphere of influence are not really saved because they have yet to make that complete surrender.

This approach to the New Birth really misses some very key elements concerning salvation. The main error of this approach revolves around the doctrine of depravity, which deals with our predisposition to fall short of God’s moral excellence. The doctrine of depravity, briefly stated, is as follows:

Man is so depraved that he does not have the ability to produce, in his person, divine good. Men are born with a fallen frame of reference which is so unlike God that all of the actions which flow from that fallen frame of reference fall far short of God’s glory. Man is not like God in his

affections. Man is not like God in his responses to life's challenges. Man does not naturally see things from God's perspective; nor does man respond to people in the way that God would respond.

Those who believe that you could be saved by a total surrender have not yet come to grips with their own depravity. They have yet to discover a very sad truth about themselves: No matter how careful they attempt to be, they will never be able to bring their mind of the flesh into harmony with the will of God. They will never be able to stop committing acts which are offensive to God. As we read in the following passage:

Romans 8:7, 8: Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be:

8 and they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

The mind of the flesh, even in the child of God, is never brought into a harmonious relation with God. Even though it is positionally put off through the miracle of the New Birth, it continues to grow corrupt, even in the believer.

Ephesians 4:22-24: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Notice here that the old man continues to grow corrupt, even after we are born again. The only hope for the sinner does not involve bringing the mind of the flesh into submission to Christ; it is, rather, in the introduction of a new person into the heart of the sinner, through the miracle of the New Birth. It is through the miracle of the New Birth that a new person, created according to the image of God, is forever established within souls. It is this new person which becomes the believer's eternal identity before God.

When confronted with the perfection of God's character, all attempts at "total surrender" will ring hollow. The genuinely born again saint bristles at such vain attempts at "total surrender," for we have all mistakenly tried it only to have failed God, over and over again. The Gospel of total surrender is, at best, self-delusion which, when seriously pursued, will leave the pursuer in a state of continual despair, realizing that, no matter how hard he tries, he has, yet again, failed God in some area of his or her life.

To try to obtain salvation, by promising to Christ to surrender to His Lordship, is to attempt to be saved by a means which God says is impossible. It is a failure of the sinner to have experientially discovered the incurable depravity of his old sin nature. Moreover, while God may be pleased that at least such a person desires a relationship with Him, to have concluded that the desired relationship can be obtained through a promise of obedience is to have failed to have rested in God's REAL provision for the sinner's righteousness: the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

Hebrews 10:14: For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

The tragedy for the individual who has tried to come to Christ through a total surrender is that such a person has failed to believe on Christ. He has failed to turn away from his own attempts at self-righteousness and to embrace God's provision for his righteousness, as set forth in the person and work of Christ. Read carefully the following passage.

Romans 10:1-3: Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

According to this context, it is possible for a person to have a zeal for God; but, if such a person has not given up on a self-established righteousness and submitted to God's provision for his righteousness, he is still among the ranks of the unjustified.

This is the real danger of the "total surrender" gospel. It leaves those who have fallen for this counterfeit on the wrong side of eternity. Such people may be zealous for many Godly things; but, if they die, having never embraced God's gift of righteousness, tragically, they will end up on the wrong side of eternity.

THE BABY BELIEVER, INTROSPECTION AND ASSURANCE

Matthew 7:20: by their fruits you will know them.

This verse is probably one of the most misused contexts in Scripture to cause new believers to doubt the genuineness of their conversion experience. Many a misguided preacher has hamstrung the growth of a newborn believer through lifting this verse out of its context and insisting that new believers become self-fruit inspectors to judge the genuineness of their conversion experience. Let us, first of all, examine the context of this verse:

Matthew 7:15-20: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 Therefore **BY THEIR FRUITS YOU SHALL KNOW THEM.**” (*Capitalization supplied*)

Clearly, the above context is not a test of a baby Christian's faith; it is, rather, the Lord's instructions for spotting a false prophet. Certainly, anyone who has been assimilating truth, such as would qualify him to speak forth the truth, should have a degree of transformation of character in his life. Certainly, with the application of truth and the passing time, a genuine representative of God will manifest the fruit of righteousness in his life.

BUT, there is a clear difference between the fruit which is expected of a mature teacher and the lack of fruit which often characterizes the walk of a baby Christian.

It is a great mistake to attempt to get a new convert to become introspective by looking to his own fruit as a source of assurance. Baby Christians may not yet possess a consistent handling of the truth such that the word is producing steady fruit in his or her life. Many are not yet rooted and grounded in grace; but, rather, can be easy tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Such a baby believer's unstable grasp of truth will certainly not be producing the fruit associated with the stability of a walk that being rooted in grace can bring.

Many a baby Christian has been stunted in his growth by an overly zealous evangelist's claim of yet another convert, when all that the evangelist really did was to scare the baby Christian out of his conversion experience. By getting the new believer to become introspective regarding assurance, many a misguided preacher has unwittingly disengaged the baby Christian from the true source of his growth: a firmer grasp on the grace work of Christ.

Genuine evangelism seeks to direct people's faith toward Christ: NOT TOWARD THEMSELVES.

When the new believer becomes introspective in regards to assurance, he will have no power to bear fruit. Moreover, where there is no power to bear fruit, there will be no growth. So, to make a long story short, to cause a baby Christian to become introspective with regards to assurance is to permanently entangle that child of God in a vicious circle of doubt.

Many a Christian has been, for years, set on the shelf because some misguided preacher has persuaded that baby Christian that assurance of salvation is derived from taking one's eyes off of Christ and becoming introspective with regards to assurance. Assurance is not gained by the believer's becoming a self-fruit inspector. Assurance is gained by looking away from self altogether and seeing, in Christ's offering of Himself, that which ALONE merits one's eternal standing before God.

As the child of God becomes rooted and grounded in THAT truth, he will gain the power to consistently bear the fruit of righteousness in his or her life.

“HEAD FAITH” OR “HEART FAITH” AND OTHER TRICKS OF THE DEVIL

I recently heard an opportunistic preacher try to introduce the concept of “head faith” versus “heart faith” into a discussion on the gospel and assurance. In this preacher’s interactions with me, he pointed to his head and said, “The problem is, lots of people’s belief is up here...” Then he pointed to his heart and said, “...and not down here.”

My first question was this: How does a heart believe? Is the heart the organ of cognitive deliberations? Or is the heart simply the organ that pumps blood throughout the human body? Such rhetoric is more than just a little confusing to the troubled soul who is striving for the assurance of salvation. How in the world is that person to know whether or not he has believed with his heart?

In the Scriptures, with reference to the human psyche, the heart may safely be defined as follows. The heart is the soul or mind, the source of thoughts, passions, desires, affections and purposes. It is the deliberative seat of the soul, the faculty of understanding.

I am aware of only one passage of Scripture which mentions heart belief in a salvation context.

Romans 10:9, 10: that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart

that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

The verse in question is verse 10: “With the heart one believes unto righteousness.” The question is this: “Did I believe with my heart?”

Maybe we need to, first of all, ask ourselves the question, “what would ‘head only’ faith look like?”

I suppose it is very possible for somebody to sit in church and recite the Apostle’s Creed and have absolutely no personal interest in that which he is reciting. That would certainly be an example of head knowledge without heart belief. That would be an example of what we read in the following verse:

Matthew 15:8: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with *their* lips, But their heart is far from Me.’

It is also quite possible for a person to say, “I believe that Jesus died for me,” but yet not have any idea of what value that is to himself in light of eternity. After all, if a person says that he believes that Jesus died for him, but does not comprehend that His was a perfect sacrifice which alone can merit a his eternal standing before God, then that person in his heart has not yet understood the gospel message or invitation. So he, too, would not have yet have believed with his heart.

I guess the real question is this: How invested is a person in the facts of the gospel? Of what value is it to that person that Christ died for his or her sins? If a person believes that an eternally right relationship with God is gained through a total surrender or commitment to Christ, then the facts of the gospel of grace have not yet illumined the heart of that individual. That person has not yet understood the value of the finished work of Christ. So, it would be safe to say, that that person had not believed with his or her heart. If, however, there was a time in that person's life where an anxiety about where he was going to spend eternity was abated and replaced by assurance when that person contemplated and understood the the gospel of grace, then it is probably safe to say that a genuine belief occurred in the heart.

The second verse of the song "Amazing Grace" goes as follows:

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relived;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

It would be safe to say that this verse, written by John Newton, was written by a man who experienced a genuine belief of the heart. He had a fear about where he was going to spend eternity which was vanquished by an understanding of the gospel of grace.

A person, who has genuinely believed the gospel, has believed it with his or her heart. The evidence of that faith

should be that, at ONE TIME in his or her life, an anxiety about where he or she was going to spend eternity was replaced by joy and peace when contemplating the facts of the gospel.

Romans 15:13: Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The problem, however, with the above statement is this: If a person is seriously struggling with doubts, if he IS genuinely saved, then the memory of his initial faith may be nothing more than a confusing event in his past. Such a person should not be attempting to gain a present assurance of salvation from contemplating the events of the past. As important as such an event is, we do not gamble the eternal destinies of our souls on an experience in our past. We do not gamble the eternal destinies of our souls on a hunch that we had all of our theological ducks in a row at some point of time in our distant and unclear past.

The soul doubting the reality of his faith needs to look away from self all together and do a fresh examination of the merits of the cross-work of Christ and renew his confidence in that perfect work of that Perfect Substitute. It is not necessary to know for certain the exact moment you passed from death unto life. The important thing is to have, at one point, abandoned all hope in self-righteousness and have embraced the gift of righteousness bought and paid for by the once and for all sacrifice of Christ.

Understand this: It is the examination of what the Bible says about what transpired on the cross of Christ, and an understanding of the value of that work for the sinner, which enables a person to believe. As we read in Romans 10:17, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” It takes the power of a properly articulated gospel to serve as the vehicle of illumination for the person desiring to be saved. Such illumination does not arise in the heart because a person wants it to be there; rather, such an illumination takes place when the Holy Spirit takes the message of the cross and, through that message, creates an understanding in a person’s conscience, an understanding which enables that person to exercise saving faith.

Saving faith cannot be exercised if such illumination has not occurred. It is pointless to try to believe without the power of a properly articulated gospel bringing an illumination to a conscience wanting to be saved. It is the message of the cross which is the illuminating power of God unto salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:18: For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Doubting people will usually be found trying to work up a “sense” of faith to gain assurance. True assurance is born from an assurance that what Jesus accomplished on the cross is sufficient to establish a person in an everlasting relationship with the Father. What doubters really need to do is to examine the Scriptures in order to discover and reach that conclusion for themselves. The chapter of this book

entitled “The Vocabulary of the Gospel” would be a good place to start to gain that knowledge.

Another problem with trying to discern between “head” and “heart” belief is that it drives the doubter who hears such mumbo jumbo to introspection. It drives him to try to trust his heart. “Was my heart sincere enough?” “Did I really believe with ALL of my heart or only 95 percent of it?” As ridiculous as this may sound to some, these are genuine struggles of the person who takes words and phrases literally. So, we preachers need to be really careful and think before we speak, because our words may be entrapping some poor soul in a vicious circle of doubt.

Here is a similar trap of the devil.

I can remember, during my times of intense doubt, people saying, “You’ve got to get a person lost before you can get him saved!” Well, if there are doubts as to the genuineness of a past conversion experience, how can a person, with certainty, know that he is lost? After all, if he might already be saved, how CAN he be certain that he is lost?

Once again, this doubt should serve as an example of why evangelists need to be careful of the terminology they use. The soul, anxious about where he or she is going to spend eternity, is hanging on the evangelist’s EVERY WORD. Words and phrases mean things. Doubters interpret clichés very literally.

The above truth would be better stated as follows: Before a person can believe and be saved, he has to come to

the point to where he abandons hope in his own righteousness as that which can commend him to God in an everlasting way.

Here is another term that is tossed around lately: “Easy Believism.” Easy Believism is a derogatory term with which to disparage the free grace position on practical sanctification. It is primarily utilized by Calvinists to find fault with the assertion of free grace believers that a genuinely born again believer may not be bearing fruit. Calvinists believe in a doctrine called, “The Perseverance of the Saints.” This belief teaches that the genuine child of God WILL bear fruit and, if there is no fruit, then the person in question was never genuinely saved. While it may be true that the newly saved child of God should manifest some fruit due to his initial communion with the Spirit of God, that this fruit will endure through the duration of the child of God’s earthly sojourning is another matter altogether.

Continued fruit bearing takes more than just being saved; it takes continued occupation with grace and truth. Unfortunately, such occupation is not automatic for the child of God. Many times in the New Testament, God’s children are exhorted to be watchful. Such watchfulness is necessary for the child of God to progress towards the image of Christ. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that children of God are not automatically victorious over the world.

If conformity to Christ WERE automatic, then the Apostle Paul would not have to make the following exhortation:

Romans 12:2: And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Why is Paul concerned about a believer being conformed to this world, if fruit bearing were automatic and certain to continue during the earthly sojourning of the child of God? The very fact that Paul has to exhort believers to experience the renewing of their minds demonstrates that such renewal is not a certainty for the child of God.

Here is another verse which demonstrates that continued production of good works is not automatic for the child of God:

Galatians 4:15: What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

Understand this: The Galatians began their life in Christ with excitement and with the power of the Holy Spirit causing selflessness in their love towards Paul. They were so full of grace, that Paul acknowledged a time in their past that, if possible, they would have plucked out their eyes and given them to Paul in order that Paul might have clear vision.

But then something happened. A false gospel influence gained a foothold at the church in Galatia. These once vibrant believers in grace were deceived into going back to the law. They immediately lost their power to love with the

selfless love of Christ. Their growth in grace was arrested, they stopped bearing fruit and were of a critical spirit one towards another. Not only was fruit bearing not automatic, a continued embracing of the genuine gospel of grace was not automatic, either. This can be demonstrated by a further examination of the book of Galatians.

Galatians 5:4: You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

By the way, the above verse does not suggest that the Galatians lost their salvation; that is impossible for the genuine child of God. But, when a child of God gets off the foundation of grace, with that falling away, they also lose all of the grace enablements of the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of righteousness.

Galatians 5:1: Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Once again, the very fact that Paul has to exhort the Galatians to stand fast demonstrates that continued faith in Christ is not automatic to the believer.

Here is another verse demonstrating that fruit bearing in the child of God is not automatic:

1 Corinthians 3:1-3: And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able;

3 for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?

Notice that Paul calls his audience carnal babes in Christ. He rebukes them because, even after he fed them with the milk of the Word, they are still carnal, indicating that they had been in that state for some time. Their carnality was being manifest in envy, strife and factions. Furthermore, Paul states that they were behaving like “mere men.” In the Scriptures, “men” is often used to refer to the unsaved in contrast to the saved. So, we can also see here, that fruit bearing is not automatic to the child of God. It takes a degree of watchfulness that many children of God do not exercise.

Understand this: The reason that free grace believers are so insistent that good works are not automatically sustained for the duration of the child of God’s earthly sojourning, is not because we are looking for a license to sin. It is because we know that believers who become self-fruit inspectors will quickly devolve into unprofitable children of God because they are looking to themselves for assurance, instead of continuing to focus on the offering of Christ. When the child of God stops reckoning on the finished work of Christ for assurance, and begins reckoning on his own fruit, the power to serve the Lord goes out the window, and the joy and peace of believing are replaced with the doubt and despair of attempting to believe in self.

THE “MUDDY MIDDLE” PREACHER

A good preacher friend and I have, throughout the years, discussed with one another the lack of clarity of many a preacher’s gospel presentation. From one week to the next, such preachers unwittingly articulate the terms upon which God grants eternal life differently than they did the week before. One week, they will proclaim a message of grace that is clear enough that a hearer hungering and thirsting for righteousness could have heard his message and actually been genuinely born again; the following week, however, this same preacher will so butcher the free grace message that every genuine seeker of God’s grace is left bewildered, discouraged, confused and in doubt of God’s saving grace, with the power of the message of that grace now zapped from their lives.

This is not an isolated problem; it is, sadly, the present state of Christendom in America.

The problem with a large group of genuine children of God is that they need to be able to grow. The bad news is that they will never be able to grow until they first become rooted and grounded in love; that is, in possession of an assurance which can only be derived in an environment which consistently articulates the free grace message of God’s grace. Until they do so, they will be children tossed to and fro, never able to gain a stable assurance of salvation.

This lack of assurance permanently disqualifies unstable believers to progress down the path to conformity

to Christ, because, from one week to the next, a “muddy middle” gospel presentation knocks them off of the foundation of Christ.

It is impossible to build a spiritual house on an uncertain foundation.

Such children of God, knocked off of the foundation, are left powerless for the remainder of their lives unless they are delivered by a consistent free grace message. Because these unstable souls lack the interpretation skills to deliver themselves from the muddy gospel preacher, they will go through life, never quite certain that they are genuine children of God. Moreover, they will settle for that constant state of uncertainty, always trying to suppress those doubts when they, yet again, hear another message from that muddy gospel-proclaiming preacher who, again, confuses the free grace message of the gospel.

This all-too-common dilemma is what motivates me in the ministry which the Lord has placed upon my heart.

To a large degree, growth in Christ is simply remaining firmly rooted in hope of the gospel. Consider the context below:

Colossians 1:21: And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled

22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight –

23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the

hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Here, Paul explains that having a laudable experience before the judgment seat of Christ is, to a large degree, contingent upon remaining grounded and steadfast in the Gospel. However, when the “muddy middle” gospel preacher causes genuine believers to become unsettled in their assurance, such firm grounding in the gospel can never take place.

When it comes to the gospel, such muddy gospel preachers have never proved the word of God for themselves; they have never agonized over the content of the gospel. They are simply parroting the gospel as they have heard other false teachers proclaim it. They are simply vomiting up some other preacher’s false gospel message. A preacher who has agonized over the content of the gospel would comprehend the contradictions in what he is saying from one week to the next.

Many genuine children of God need to be delivered from the muddy gospel preacher. They need to be rescued from their confusion-spawning pulpits. They need to come out of these doubt-creating churches so that they can be properly rooted and grounded in the love and grace of Christ.

Only eternity will reveal how much the muddy gospel message has thwarted the purpose of God, who wants His children to be established in assurance.

THE DIVINE SWAP

One thing that can help the child of God gain a settled assurance is a fuller understanding of what happens when he is born again. One of the most fundamental realities that make a person forever secure is a divine swap that occurs at the point of saving faith.

When a person is born again, through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, a divine swap takes place as far as that person's eternal identity is concerned. When a person is born again, God creates, within that individual, a new person, made in God's own Holy image. Simultaneously with the creation of this new man, there is a change of association. The eternal person that the new believer is before God is transferred from His former person to this new person. It is this new person who will now spend eternity with God.

That this is the case can be seen in Paul's discussion of his new "I" in Romans chapter 7.

Romans 7:17-20: But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

The reason that Paul can speak this way is that his identity before God changed when he was born again. His identity is no longer associated with that flesh which habitually rubs God the wrong way; it is now with that new person which was created within when he first believed the gospel of grace.

Notice in the above context that Paul is still struggling with sin. The difference now is this: that part of him which is still sinning is not his everlasting identity before God; rather, it is now associated with only his flesh which is destined to cease to exist, upon his death or rapture.

Paul likewise confirms this truth of a new creation in the following context:

2 Corinthians 5:16, 17: Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

According to this passage, Paul, in his teaching of the new believer, is no longer relating to those disciples as according to the flesh; that is, the focus of his ministry is not upon addressing the flesh of the child of God. Rather, Paul is relating to (knowing) the new person, building up that new person with grace teaching so that this new person exhibits more sway over the believer's decisions than the impulsive lusts of the flesh.

The most fundamental reality of a genuine new birth experience, which makes a person eternally secure in his relationship with God, is the creation of this new person on the inside of the believer. This new person is created in the image of God as a baby, but a baby which is capable of assimilating only God's truth that he might grow. Several additional verses can be brought to bear which demonstrate this creation of this new man.

1 Peter 2:2: as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

Ephesians 4:24: and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

The primary reason that a person is secure in Christ is that this new man, created in the image of God, does not have the capability to sin. He is created in the image of God in a confirmed state of righteousness. He is incapable of sinning and, therefore, incapable of offending God.

1 John 3:9: Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

It is this new man, created in the image of God, who cannot sin, who will forever dwell in the presence of God. This is the primary reason a person is secure forever.

So what happens to the old person?

The old person, that is, that nature with which we were born, continues to exist as part of our earthly experience; but is surgically removed as a part of our eternal identity before God. When we are saved, a spiritual surgery takes place, a circumcision, if you will, of our former self from the eternal person we are before God. The following verse demonstrates that this is the case:

Colossians 2:11: In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Likewise, Paul, in Romans, states that this old man is no longer part of our eternal identity before God. When we believe on Jesus as our sin-bearing substitute, our former person is dispatched away from our eternal identity, so that we are freed from its being a part of our eternal person.

Romans 6:6, 7: knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.

“No longer slaves of sin” means that the old man is no long chained to our eternal identity; but, rather, is scheduled to be sent to the grave when we die.

From the above verses, we see that a new man is created and the old man is put away. At this point, the Father

decrees that this new man is our true, everlasting identity before Him.

The “old man” of the child of God goes to the grave when he departs this earth. The “old man” of the person who has never believed remains as his identity before God, incapable of communing with God; and, thus, is forever banished from His presence. The reason that people spend eternity alienated from God is that the only person they have before God is an old man who does not have the capacity for communion with God. Such a person could not tolerate the presence of God; nor could God tolerate his presence.

When a person is born again, through faith in Christ, a new person is created inside. This new being is introduced into our person as an infant and, when properly nurtured, grows to become the dominant personality in our lives. It is the purpose of God that, as this new person matures, our whole person would begin to be directed by his values.

Like the God who has birthed him, this new person cannot sin.

1 John 3:9: Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

This new person is now the believer’s identity before God. When the child of God departs this earth, it is this new person, with all of his works done in Christ, which passes into the presence of God.

It appears that only free grace people truly grasp the significance of this new person in relation to the security of our final destiny. People who do not believe in eternal security have the idea that salvation is all about cleaning up the behavior of the old man; this is not true. The old man is not cleaned up in the new birth, he is severed from the eternal person that we are.

The New Birth is not an improvement of our former person; it is, rather, the addition of a new person. The former person that we are, by virtue of our physical birth, is not altered or improved; it continues to respond to the corrupt priorities of the world and, if left unchecked through the strength of the new man, will continue grow more and more corrupt.

Ephesians 4:22-24: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Here, we see that the old man of the child of God continues to grow corrupt, if the child of God continues to be occupied with deceitful lusts. As the new man assimilates Bible truths into his being, he grows and gains the strength to quickly judge the deceitful lusts which arise from his flesh, before those lusts wreak havoc with his earthly existence. It is this new person who will spend eternity with God; our former person, with his corrupt values, goes to the

grave. If a person has not been born again before he departs this earth, he departs this earth with only the old person intact, who does not have the capacity to dwell in the presence of God. Moreover, there is only one other place where departed spirits can go and it is not a pleasant place.

THE NON-MERITORIOUS NATURE OF SAVING FAITH

Let me ask you this: have you ever sat down, hungry, at the dinner table with a big ol' serving of mashed potatoes and gravy on your plate and then sat there for ten minutes wondering if the metal spoon in your hand would be sufficient to eat those potatoes?

“Now wait a minute, I am not sure that the alloy of which this spoon is made is appropriate for eating mashed potatoes with pork gravy.”

How absurd! Right? Yet, when it comes to believing in the value of the finished work of Christ, how many people focus on their faith and wonder if their faith is strong enough to “save their soul”?

The Gospel is the good news that Christ has grappled with and settled your sin debt to the Father's complete, total and final satisfaction. The satisfaction with which the Father views the sin-settling work of Christ can be the basis of your forever relationship with God, free for the believing. When you believe in that finished work for yourself, you stand, forever just, before God because God accepts that offering of Christ as that which has made your peace with Him.

The act of saving faith is nothing more than appropriating to your soul that which you understand can meet your need of righteousness. It is not the strength of the act of faith which God the Father considers; it is in what (or

whom) that faith is being placed. Faith is nothing more than the instrument which apprehends and appropriates to oneself the value of the finished work of Christ. Faith is not that which merits our eternal standing before God. Christ and His sacrifice for us is that merit.

Just as a person does not critically examine his spoon before diving into a bowl of mashed potatoes and gravy, neither does the sinner need to wonder about his faith. Rather, the sinner only needs to be convinced that the sacrifice of Christ is fully sufficient to serve as the basis of an eternal relationship with God, and must, in that sacrifice alone, rest the eternal destiny of his soul.

THAT IS FAITH.

ASSURANCE: THE FOUNDATION OF GOOD WORKS

In classical Calvinism (in fact, in most theological circles), it is taught that we can have the assurance of salvation by observing our good works. The Bible teaches just the opposite; that is, assurance is not based upon our good works, but good works are based upon our assurance. It is necessary for a believer to be assured of an eternal home in Heaven before he can begin to, in a meaningful way, accrue good works to the Glory of God.

I can remember the confusion which occupied my soul when I first became a believer in my struggles for assurance, struggles which occurred because of all the garbage that was in my soul from all of the wrong doctrine that had not yet been weeded out of my soul. I can remember serving the Lord with fear in my soul, not sure that I was going to heaven. I can remember the absolute lack of power and the turmoil that was going on in my soul. I was trying to serve the Lord when I myself was not sure whether I was on my way to heaven. I later learned that God does not want His children serving Him while in a state of fear. Such service does not bring glory to His plan of salvation.

Understand this: God is not glorified by a relationship based upon fear and intimidation. He is not glorified if the only reason we are serving Him is that we are scared we are going to hell if we do not serve Him. Just as a good husband does not intimidate his wife into making him breakfast, neither does the Father intimidate His children into

obedience. Such intimidation would subject our relationship with God to public ridicule.

I don't get up every morning and threaten to beat or divorce my wife if she doesn't make me breakfast. I don't "slap her around" if she does not follow my lead. What type of reputation would our marriage have if I was a wife beater? Only a joyous wife brings glory to her husband. Thus, God does not want to be remembered throughout eternity as the Being who intimidated His people into service. Just as my relationship with my wife is not based upon intimidation, so the Lord would not be glorified in that type of relationship. Such a relationship would be, and rightly so, subject to everlasting ridicule. The devil could forever raise the criticism, "Well, of course they served you! They were scared not to!" "There's no victory for You in that type of service"!

An overarching desire of God is that He wants a relationship between Himself and his children based upon friendship: A relationship above ridicule, a relationship not subject to censorship, a relationship based upon uncoerced fellowship and loyalty.

The devil wants to disparage the relationship between God and His children. The devil wants to be able to say, "Well of course they all worshiped you; they were scared not to!" If, into eternity future, the devil can find fault with the reason God's children served Him (and intimidation would be such a reason) then his ridicule of the relationship between God and His children has merit. So, the devil is out to disparage the relationship between God and His servants.

He wants to ascribe the obedience of God's children to some other motive than their love of communing with their Father.

So, in order for the God's relationship with His children to be forever beyond censorship, their service for Him must be out of the companionship of like-minded beings and not because of the intimidation of a despot. Such a relationship begins with an assurance that God's children are His forever children.

In human relationships, a child's sense of a stable relationship is called "bonding." The bond between the child and the parent is at the core of every successful child rearing experience. It is likewise necessary that God's children experience a bonding with Him, a sense that they are secure in His grace. The Scriptures refer to the stability of such a relationship as being rooted, grounded or established in His grace.

Ephesians 3:17-19 (literal translation): that Christ may through the faith dwell in your hearts rooted and grounded in love,

18 that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height –

19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Hebrews 13:9: Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods

which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

Every one of Paul's epistles starts out with a positive affirmation of the recipients' position before God in Christ, regardless of their lack of maturity in grace. This is because Paul knew that the foundation of every spiritual advancement in grace begins with an assurance of salvation based upon Christ's work and no one's own works. Even the epistle of 1 Corinthians, which is one rebuke after another, starts out with a statement on the Corinthian believers' beloved relation with their Father.

1 Corinthians 1:3-8: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,

6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,

7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

8 who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul starts each one of his epistles with a positive affirmation of his audience's relationship to God. This is because the assurance of salvation is at the foundation of every advancement in grace.

Before a Christian can begin bearing fruit to the Glory of God, it is the will of God that that believer be established in the assurance of salvation. Only a believer who is established in assurance can serve the Lord out of love and not out of coercion. Coerced obedience does not bring glory to God.

Romans 14:17, 18: for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

18 For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men.

Notice here that our service to God is to flow out of a heart filled with joy and peace, not out of fear and intimidation. According to the above verse, that is the only type of service which is acceptable to God.

God will not direct you into a life of good works as long as you are wondering whether or not you are saved. He does not want your coerced obedience, as it will not bring glory to your relationship with Him.

Our relationship with God must be one which is above censor, a companionship with God in ministry which is uncoerced, which in no way involves fear and intimidation. Only this type of partnering can bring glory to God's wonderful plan of salvation. It is from this type of relationship that good works are to flow: good works which are based on assurance.

In closing, here is why assurance is important: There must be a relationship with God which does not contain a

component of fear. The truth of the matter is this; our entrance into a relationship with God DID contain an element of fear. So, the assurance of salvation guarantees that our partnering with the Lord contains no element of fear.

Once a person has believed the gospel, God's next goal for His child is to be established in the assurance of salvation: an assurance in which the believer knows he is on his way to heaven regardless of whether or not there is consistent fruit. This assurance guarantees that our service to Him contains no element of intimidation, because only that type of companionship is a victory for His grace.

1 John 4:17, 18: Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

“PREACHER ROULETTE”

Some people continually doubt their relationship with God because they do not have the skills they need to, with certainty, come to their own conclusions concerning some fundamentals of the faith but must, rather, rely on the opinions of men as a source of assurance. Moreover, since men are fallible, assurance derived from their opinions is also uncertain.

The Holy Spirit will not establish a person in assurance when that person is harboring a fundamental error in his soul concerning the way of grace. Such a person may be living in a constant state of uncertainty because, someplace in his faith, there exists a hope in personal performance as that which is able to establish, or keep, him in a relationship with God.

There are many respected preachers out there who name the name of Christ, nationally respected preachers, who really say and teach some very destructive things, entrapping people, for a lifetime, in a vicious circle of doubt and despair. If a person does not possess the skills to, with certainty, debunk the errors in these preachers, he will be trapped, for his entire life, under a haze of uncertainty. It is sometimes amazing how on one occasion some preachers can clearly articulate the gospel and the next week, “where did that come from”? If a person cannot, with certainty, reject the error of his favorite radio preacher, he might be left struggling in doubt.

If you don't like playing "preacher roulette" with the eternal destiny of your soul, (pitting one preacher's opinion against another's), then, sooner or later, you are going to have to develop your own translational or interpretative skills so that you can, with certainty, draw your own conclusions concerning what the Scriptures actually teach on this all-important subject. For me, that meant gaining a comfort level in the original Greek of the New Testament; such that, I, with certainty, could refute what any nationally famous, universally beloved, false prophet was teaching. I have absolutely no trouble with refuting the positions of men like John MacArthur, Wayne Gruden, or any other free grace-denying, nationally famous, theological figure. I know the error of what they are teaching and how they have arrived at their conclusions in Scripture.

There is something to be said about not having to get all of one's opinions from commentaries. There is something to be said about not having to fill one's library with the opinions of other men. Since most conservative commentaries of the past century were written by Calvinists, why would you want their writings in your library, anyway? There is something very freeing about not having to play "preacher roulette" with the eternal destiny of your soul because you, with certainty, can draw out the meaning of any given context of Scripture.

I have friends who do not have formal schooling in New Testament Greek who still, with certainty, can come to unshakable conclusions concerning grace. They are taking advantage of the many lexical aids for English-only students of the Word.

If you are young and have the time and inclination for it, gaining translational skills in New Testament Greek will pay a lifetime of rewards. Possessing these skills enables a person to consider alternative readings and the nuances of the original text that only original language skills can draw out. Possessing these skills allows a person to consider what a difficult passage of Scripture may be saying without having to rely on another man's opinion.

Of course, the reason that I struggled with doubts for several years into my Christian experience is because the Lord was allowing me to go through these trials so that I could weed all of the clichéd garbage out of my soul. He was preparing me to be able to help others come to assurance, and the power that such certainty brings into a person's life. Looking back, He did that in MY life so that I could help others in their desperate search for a certainty concerning a home in heaven. I think that just about every doubt with which the devil could torment a person, concerning assurance of salvation, the Lord has allowed me to experience so that I could help others analyze their own doubts in light of Scripture.

For me, the ultimate cure for those doubts was weeding out all of the false information from my own soul, information to which the Holy Spirit could not, and would not, bear witness; and replacing that information with a Biblical framework for assurance. This meant having to come to the conclusion that some of my own beloved theologians who, initially, influenced my life, were, nonetheless, terribly wrong on the core issues of the gospel. It took years of diligent and original research in the Scriptures to be able to conclude that some very common

teachings held by a whole bunch of respected preachers were just plain wrong and destructive towards establishing a person in assurance. Being able to come to such conclusions takes arriving at a comfort level in one's translational and interpretive skills such that he can rise up and reject the conclusions of a whole lot of preachers who, for some time, have been parroting the errors of others.

The child of God cannot experience the joy and peace of believing, when, at the foundation of his faith, false hopes exist.

Romans 15:13: Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

WHERE TO START READING THE BIBLE

One common mistake, which often keeps the baby believer in a perpetual state of infancy, is to begin studying the Bible with the first four books of the New Testament. Such an endeavor will result in the believer in grace becoming confused by certain statements made in those books.

I mean, what did Jesus have in mind when He told His disciples, “He who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13)? I thought that, when we were saved, we were saved forever and didn’t have to hold out.

What did Jesus mean when He told His disciples?

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36)?

How is it possible that somebody might be counted worthy? I didn’t think anybody was worthy to be saved!

Or how about these words of the Lord to His apostles:

John 20:23: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

How is it that the apostles are going to now be in the sin-forgiving business?

Or how about the following:

Matthew 18:8, 9: “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.”

9 “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”

I thought that, when we believers get to Heaven, we are going to receive perfect glorified bodies. How is it that the Lord is talking about entering into a future life without limbs and eyes?

Or how about this statement:

Matthew 6:15: “But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

In addition to being saved, do we now have to be a consistently forgiving person to ultimately make it to Heaven?

I could go on and on with such confusing statements from the first four books of the New Testament. Hopefully,

these few should suffice as to why it is not a good idea to advise a new convert to begin his study with these books.

So, why do we find such statements in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? Why is Paul so clear that, when we are saved, we are saved forever; but these statements in the four gospels do not mesh well with the teachings of Paul and the eternal security which is found therein?

There are several reasons that this seemingly apparent contradiction occurs.

First of all, the Lord Jesus had arrived at the end of the dispensation of the Law of Moses and, among other things, He was about to enter into judgment with the Jews for the light which had already been dispensed to them in the Law and the Prophets. This contrasts with the teachings of Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, to a group of people who had not received any previous Scripture. The Lord had not showed up to enter into judgment with a body of gentiles on the basis of how they occupied themselves with previously dispensed truth; none had yet been dispensed to them.

Understand this about a dispensation of God: Dispensations begin with God delivering a body of truth, followed by a time of testing, during which the Lord observes whether those to whom the truth was dispensed will respond to it. At the conclusion of the dispensation, God enters into judgment with those people, a judgment on the basis of how they responded to the light which had been dispensed to them. Those who responded positively pass safely (are saved) into the next dispensation. Those who

squandered their opportunity to respond to light do not pass into the next dispensation.

We see the Lord, in His teaching to the Jews as recorded in the first four books of the New Testament, demanding that the Jews bring forward from the Old Testament previously dispensed truth in order that they might comprehend His teachings. If they had squandered their opportunity with the light, which had previously been dispensed in the law and the prophets, the Lord was not going to teach it again. We see this principle in the following context.

Matthew 13:10-15: And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

11 He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

12 “For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

13 “Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

14 “And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,

And seeing you will see and not perceive;

15 For the hearts of this people have grown dull.

Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear
with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts
and turn, So that I should heal them.””

Notice verse 12 in the above context; it contains the explanation as to why the Lord taught in parables. It was the means by which the Lord discriminated between those who were and those were not His sheep. His sheep were able to take the previously dispensed truth of the Old Testament which they had assimilated and, through that prerequisite light, comprehend the identity of Christ and His teachings. However, those who were not His sheep did not have the prerequisite light and, therefore, did not recognize Christ and, thus, comprehend His teaching. We see the Lord utilizing this principle throughout the first four books of the New Testament.

Mark 4:34a: and without a parable He did not speak to them.

By the way, to fail to understand this dispensational principle in the teachings of Jesus is to COMPLETELY MISINTERPRET THE FIRST FOUR BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. The words of Jesus were not given to people with no previous light (the gentiles); rather, His teachings were to an audience to which light had already been dispensed and, as such, He demanded that they bring forward previously dispensed truth, in order that they might

“connect the dots.” Those who could not do so were destined for judgment.

Another reason that the Lord’s ministry towards the Jews does not look like Paul’s ministry to the gentiles is that the Lord’s ministry to the Jewish people was not an evangelistic one. It was, rather, a sheep recovery mission. As He traveled throughout the regions of Israel, He was manifesting His signs and teaching in such a way that His sheep (Old Testament justified saints) would recognize Christ and follow Him while those who were not His sheep would not have a clue. In this way, His sheep were gathered unto Him in preparation for the soon to appear Kingdom while the rest were going to be excluded and purged from that Kingdom.

John 10:27: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

Along with this sheep recovery mission, the Lord is attempting to mature His sheep in order that their transition into the Kingdom might be as smooth as possible. The Lord was trying to mature them to the point that His sheep might bypass altogether the trials of the Great Tribulation. If His sheep were watchful in their assimilation of truth and in their walk, if they could grow into kind and forgiving people before the tribulation started, it was possible that they could be counted worthy to altogether bypass the troubles of the Great Tribulation and arrive in the Kingdom, unscathed, in a physical body.

Luke 21:36 “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all

these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Much like a church age saint today can escape many trials by being watchful in his or her walk, thus a Jewish saint could bypass the Great Tribulation if he were already conducting him or herself in a manner worthy of the Kingdom. In either case, the issue is not whether not a person is in an eternally right relationship with God; the issue is, rather, how much chastening the child of God needs to produce maturity in his or her life.

Understand this: The Lord’s teachings in the first four books of the New Testament are not from the perspective that the church age is going to be the next dispensation in God’s divine plan; rather, they anticipated that the earthly Kingdom was to have had a soon, and not a postponed, appearance. Even after His resurrection, the Lord is still instructing His apostles concerning their role in the up and coming earthly Kingdom.

John 20:23 “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

This would be in accordance with their new positions as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30, Matthew 18:18).

As such, Christ’s teachings are not to church age believers whose citizenship is in heaven; but, rather, earth bound saints who are looking for an earthly Kingdom and who wish to enter that Kingdom unharmed by the events of

the Great Tribulation, thus entering that Kingdom in their flesh and blood bodies.

The impact of this distinction is profound. Christ was not seeking to evangelize gentiles with no previous light of Scripture. His stated priority was, rather, to seek to gather the lost sheep of Israel, people already in a relationship with the Father, and to transition them toward occupation with grace in preparation for the coming Kingdom.

Matthew 10:5, 6: These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans.

6 “But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

And, as He told the Canaanite woman:

Matthew 15:24: But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Yet, many church age teachers insist on attempting to synchronize Christ’s offer of the Kingdom to the Jews with Paul’s invitation of grace to the gentiles which, sadly, confuses countless immature believers concerning the gospel of grace.

I can’t tell you how many times I have met a new believer who told me that he was going to start studying the New Testament in the book of Matthew. Quite certainly, if such a baby believer were not also sitting under a grace-

teaching pastor, he would not, at any time soon, be grounded in the assurance of his salvation; that is, if he seriously considers what he is reading. Frankly, I would expect a grace-teaching pastor, to refocus his new convert's attention upon the Epistles of Paul, those of Peter, or upon the book of Hebrews, which do not anticipate a soon to appear earthly Kingdom of Christ.

It is not until we are well into the book of Acts that we see the offer of the Kingdom being permanently abandoned by God's messengers and a church consisting of gentile believers, with no Jewish affiliation, now chosen as the ambassadors of God to the world. Even though Christ, at the conclusion of His ministry, had told the Israelites that the Kingdom was going to be taken from them, (Matthew 23:43, Mark 12:9, Luke 13:35), we still see, in the book of Acts, the continued exhortations to repentance by the apostles, in hopes that the Kingdom might soon appear (Acts 2:38-39, Acts 3:19, Acts 13:46, Acts 28:25-28).

The preparations for the coming tribulation anticipated that there would need to be a degree of transformation manifested by the Jewish saint if he was to hope to be counted worthy to bypass the trials of the Great Tribulation. They would need to be already manifesting the power to forgive, the power to love their enemies and, in general, already be manifesting a degree of Godliness worthy of the coming earthly Kingdom. This would certainly involve the Lord imparting to them the enablements of the Holy Spirit before the tribulation began.

This aspect of the Lord's Kingdom teaching can easily confuse the immature church age saint who has correctly

been taught that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in the finished work of Christ alone.

The Jewish saint being dismissed (forgiven) from the trials of the Great Tribulation is actually quite similar to the church age saint being dismissed (forgiven) from a disciplinary response by God as a result of the believer confessing his sins (I John 1:9). In the dispensation of the church, when the child of God confesses his sins, he is forgiven. This forgiveness does not result in a restoration of eternal salvation; it is, rather, an abandonment (forgiveness) on the part of the Father of a disciplinary course of action being calculated for an errant child. Thus, the Jewish saint, who keeps short accounts with God, was to be able to also avoid (be forgiven from) the trials of the Great Tribulation. After all, if the peaceable fruit of righteousness already exists in one of His children, is further chastening necessary (Heb. 12:11)? As Peter said, IF NEED BE, you have been grieved by various trials (I Peter 1:6).

Many doubts can arise in the genuine seeker's soul when he is trying to synthesize the gospel of the Kingdom with the gospel of grace. They are two different messages, with two different purposes, to two different audiences and, as such, should not occupy the initial deliberations of a babe in Christ.

1 Peter 2:1, 2: Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,

2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

Hebrews 13:9: Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

So, to answer my original question: To which books of the Bible do I initially direct new believers? I start them out in the Epistles of Paul. I have them first read Galatians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, First and Second Thessalonians, and First and Second Corinthians, in order to get them firmly established in grace. From there, I suggest that they read Hebrews, and then Romans, Paul's pastoral epistles and First and Second Peter. Next, I refer them to the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel in the Old Testament. Finally, I tell them to proceed to the Book of Acts.

The first four books of the New Testament primarily document the Lord's strivings with the Jews, in an attempt to gather them unto Himself in order to establish the earthly Kingdom of Christ. Because of God's grace and the so very limited positive response of the Jewish people, the Lord's Kingdom plans were postponed and, instead, God instituted the Church to, at this time, move forward His earthly ministry by means of gentile believers in grace. Without these first four books, and the book of Acts, there would be no chain of authority through which the church could be considered a legitimate work of God. With those five books, we have the documentation of God's offer of the Kingdom, Israel's refusal of the Kingdom and the necessity of God to continue His outreach through an assembly of "whosoever wills."

John 1:11, 12: He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

LINGUISTICALLY AND THEOLOGICALLY INACCURATE RHETORIC

There have been, for some time in Christendom, many doctrinally incorrect hymns and much inaccurate religious jargon which, even though a great many of God's children are not troubled by them, the serious consumer of God's truth finds them quite unsettling. Moreover, while certainly most who use this rhetoric just assume that everyone in the sanctuary knows exactly what is meant, sooner or later, such rhetoric produces doubts in the analytical consumer of Biblical truth.

Just for the record, I have had a vegetable garden for about 14 years now. Never once has "He walked with me and talked with me" in my vegetable garden. Never once have I heard a still, small voice whilst watering my plants, "telling me that I was His own." So, why is everyone singing that song? Why am I the only one in this church who never hears this still small voice? WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME? I MUST NOT BE SAVED BECAUSE I AM NOT HAVING THIS EXPERIENCE! If the experience of the song is not happening to YOU either, then why are YOU singing it?

By the way, now that I have grown up a little in grace, if I were to hear such a still, small voice in my garden, I would look for a hidden speaker or, as a last resort, call in an exorcist.

I recently downloaded an article from the internet by a Baptist who has correctly cited errors in so many of our hymns (even traditional hymns) sung in churches today. It is no wonder that I cannot wait until the teaching begins. I, for one, do not like raising my voice to the Lord in song and singing false doctrine. I can't do it anymore. I cannot sing "Victory in Jesus" when it contains a reference to a corrupt gospel invitation ("Then I repented of my sins and won the victory.")

I remember singing the song "Jesus Saves" and wondering "What does that mean"? How does Jesus save? What does He do to the sinner to save him? I wanted to know, WHAT DOES HE DO? Of course most people have never even questioned the theological inaccuracy of that song, or of that simple two word sentence, after all, if He is the Savior then He MUST save.

But here is what goes through the mind of the critical student of the word of God:

"Jesus saves" is a two word sentence, Jesus being the subject of the sentence, and "saves" is a present tense active indicative verb. Since it is in the active voice, the subject of the sentence is committing the action of the verb. Let's examine the New Testament epistles to see what happens when a person is born again, and then again, consider that two-word sentence, "Jesus saves."

Let's first of all assume that the person making this two-word statement, or singing this song, is talking about the new birth. If we are talking about the new birth, let's

examine what each person of the Godhead's role IS in the believer's passing from death unto life:

- **God the Holy Spirit**, as the curator of the human conscience, convicts the conscience of the unbeliever of his need to believe on Christ.

John 16:8: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: "of sin, because they do not believe in Me;

God the Holy Spirit also regenerates the believing sinner:

Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and **renewing of the Holy Spirit**, (*Boldface supplied.*)

- **God the Father**, as the decreeing agent of the Godhead, declares the believing sinner to be righteous:

Romans 3:26: to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God the Father, as the decreeing agent of the Godhead, transfers the believing sinner into Christ:

Colossians 1:12, 13: giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

God, as the decreeing agent of the Godhead, sends forth the command for the believing sinner to be born again:

Ephesians 2:4-7: But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

God the Father decrees that the entire new birth process be set in process.

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Notice, in the above verse, that it is God the Father who begets us again.

So again, I must ask the question, what part does the Lord Jesus, the second person of the God-head, play in this event? Is it theologically accurate to sing “Jesus saves”?

- **God the Son** makes it all possible by having removed the barrier of sin which had previously made it impossible for God to execute this immediate sequence of events in the new birth.

It is the finished work of Christ which makes the sequence of events of the new birth possible. It is something that Jesus did in our past which constitutes His part in the believing sinner’s passing from death unto life.

Here is the part that Jesus, the second Person of the Godhead, contributes to the salvation of the believing sinner:

1 Corinthians 15:1-4: Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,

2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

Notice that what Jesus did to make the new birth possible was something that He did in the past. He DIED for our sins, was buried and rose again (past tense).

1 Corinthians 1:23: but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

Once again, “we preach Christ Crucified” (past tense); it is His past sacrifice which makes the events of the new birth possible. So, to be technically and theologically accurate, it is God the Father who is the decreeing agent of the new birth. Consider again I Peter 1:3-4.

1 Peter 1:3, 4: Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

I am sure that, to most of the people reading this chapter, this may sound like much ado about nothing. However, to the analytical consumer of Bible teaching, there is a huge difference between a present tense and a past tense verb. When the Scriptures tell us that God the Father “has begotten us again,” the two-word sentence, “Jesus saves” draws a blank in our theological frame of reference.

Now, if by “Jesus saves,” the name “Jesus” refers to the whole plan of God in our redemption, of which the offering of Christ makes possible, there can certainly be no argument there.

Also, if by “Jesus saves,” you are making reference to the present, progressive sanctification of the child of God, then our two-word sentence would be accurate. The Lord Jesus is our advocate with the Father, and the shepherd of the sheep. The Lord Jesus is currently cleansing His church with the “washing of water by the word” The Lord Jesus will also be our future deliverer in the rapture of the church.

Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

In all of these ways and more the Lord is said to be involved in our present sanctification and future deliverance.

The above discussion of the two-word sentence “Jesus saves” is the same reason I never say to a person, “Trust Jesus to save you.” Once again, when we consider the sequence of events which transpires in the new birth, what IS the present tense activity of the second Person of the Godhead in THAT event? HMMMM? Are you drawing a blank? So does every serious student of Scripture. If that student just so happens to struggle with the tension created over theologically inaccurate statements, then you have just again sent his mind into a tailspin of doubt and confusion, causing him to wonder how it is that the rest of us do not see the inconsistency in our rhetoric. Such a doubter again wonders, “What’s wrong with me?” when the real question should be, “Why are all these people using theologically inaccurate rhetoric?”

Saving faith is not trusting Jesus to do anything; it is rather believing that He has ALREADY answered the

demands of divine justice against our sin, and by faith resting in the sufficiency of THAT sacrifice. The word “trust” is not used in Scripture as the step the sinner needs to take in order that he might pass from death unto life. Rather the sinner is to believe in the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice and rest the eternal destiny of his soul on the merit of that work.

If saving faith and trust are the same thing, then why is the word “trust” never employed in the Scriptures in those contexts which address saving faith, especially when there already exists two Greek verbs which are often translated “trust ”, *πεπειθω* and *Ελπίζω*, and those words have a common occurrence in Scripture?

The word “trust” does not properly communicate the saving response to the gospel. Trust is a confidence based upon familiarity with another. To trust someone is to risk or depend upon another to take care of a very important future circumstance. It presupposes a prior familiarity with the integrity of the person who is to be trusted. The reason we trust someone is that we are familiar with his or her character.

The unsaved, since they are not at all acquainted with Christ’s faithfulness, do not possess any experience with the person of Christ to really exercise trust. Trusting Christ is something that believers are challenged to do with their future hopes and ambitions. Believers are called to die to self, set aside their selfish ambitions and trust Christ with the details of their lives. He, as a faithful Savior indeed, takes care of the details of the lives of those who know Him.

But, that act of faith which forever transfers us from death unto life, is not relying on Jesus to do something in response to faith; rather, it is relying upon something that Jesus has already done as being sufficient to eternally commend us to the Father; namely, His having satisfied the righteous demands of the Father against our sins.

Saving faith is a one-time act of the will in which the sinner bets the eternal destiny of his soul upon a satisfactory payment, which the Lord Jesus has offered to God the Father in his behalf. When a sinner executes that one-time act of faith, God the Father declares that person to be eternally righteous, places that person in Christ, creates within that person, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, a new person made in His own image, and gives that believer the indwelling Holy Spirit as a resident Teacher and Comforter. After we pass from death unto life, the Lord Jesus becomes our Savior in many wonderful ways; but, until He becomes a person's Savior on the basis of His substitutionary sacrifice, to hope for salvation on any other basis is to hope in vain.

Since we are discussing this "trust" issue, this is the same mistake of the proponents of the crossless gospel. Their gospel presentation basically says "trust Jesus to save you and he will do it". So now the eternal destiny of one's soul has as its basis a meritorious act of believing, in which, in exchange for a person's faith, the Lord grants eternal life.

Many non-crossless gospel proponents likewise make the "believe Jesus is going to save you" step, a necessary component of saving faith. Once again, like the crossless gospel people, they twist what is suppose to be a non-

meritorious act of appropriating faith into an act which merits eternal life. Both of the above positions cause faith to become a meritorious step in a person passing from death unto life.

Our faith does not “earn” eternal life. Biblically speaking, the assurance of salvation occurs because the sinner is fully persuaded of the facts of the gospel. In a Biblical model of the New Birth, assurance is built right into the act of believing. The reason a person believes is because he has become fully persuaded, through an examination of the facts of the gospel, that Christ and Him crucified IS at the center of God’s plan of salvation. He has an assurance that that is true. Assurance arises because of that supernatural illumination of the conscience brought about by the power of a supernatural message: the gospel of grace. When a sinner has been persuaded that Jesus has already made his peace through the blood of His cross and is assured of that fact, all that is left for the sinner to do is let God know that he embraces this plan of salvation. When the sinner exercises such positive volition towards the fact of the Gospel, he passes from death unto life.

1 Corinthians 1:17-24: For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

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