

BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY 101

Have you risked your eternal destiny on
the teachings of man?

*Going back to the source to look at the
Biblical requirements for eternal life.*

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. Matthew 15:8-9

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Introduction

This book is in response to a growing tendency in the Church to follow after the teachings of men. Satan, the “father of lies”, is a master at deception, so it’s not surprising that there is an enormous amount of deception in religion. The Bible is the only unchanging authority for Christianity. It has stood the test of time and endless scrutiny. If you’re not fervently reading your Bible, you have no way of knowing if your beliefs are in line with God’s will. Christians of every generation have had to be careful that their culture has not affected their views, but look only to the Bible for guidance. Slaughtering Jews, slavery, and racism have all been practiced by the majority of Christians in different eras, even though now we can clearly see from the scriptures that what they did is wrong. We have to accept the fact that we can make this type of mistake now and therefore be very careful in what we accept as truth as a result of what is believed by many around us.

What I am going to attempt, is to show you is that the idea of what it means to be a Christian has drastically changed from the Biblical model. The life of a Christian is to be much more eternally focused and full of action driven by that focus than what has become accepted in our generation. I’ll attempt to show this using logic, early church writings, examples of the apostles and early Christians, but most importantly from clearly stated scriptures. I’d like to at least ask that you become aware of this possibility so that you can see it more and more clearly for yourself as you read the Bible in the coming years. Perhaps this book will help you remove any blinders that have been put on you by the teachings of men. I do hope that you are diligently reading your Bible because it is the only way you’ll be able to escape the commonly held beliefs of those around you, which as we’ve seen can be in error.

My goal with this book is not to guilt you into reluctantly doing a list of things to be saved (legalism), but to show you what God expects so you can humbly ask His forgiveness and let Him fill you so you want to do them. Keep praying until you see a heart change. As the scripture on the cover says, it’s a heart issue: “their hearts are far from me”. For example, take someone who just got saved out of a dark life of sin. They love reading the Bible, telling others about Jesus, and helping people. It’s because they “love much because they’ve been forgiven much” (Luke 7:47). We all just have to be careful not to lose that love because of the distractions of the world (the “weeds” of Luke 8). We need to cast aside all the things that distract us from meaningful time with the Creator. Take time to remember that He is right there with you always, looking for you to walk with Him, just as He called out to Adam and Eve in the garden after they fell (Genesis 3:8-9). My ultimate goal is for you to fervently keep the two greatest commandments with His strength working through you:

³⁷ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

God is more serious about obedience than most people seem to think, but He is also very loving. He has high standards that we should take seriously, but He really wants you to make it and wants to help you.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13. There are many more scriptures like this, which I'll get into)

My greatest warning and request is to please read this book with caution, being careful not to dismiss things based on popular opinion or what you've always heard and believed. The book is full of scripture. I use scripture after scripture to show what God expects of us. There are many people who will be terribly shocked when they meet God (there is a chapter on that). I don't want you to be one of them. That's why I've made the effort to print this book and give it to you free of charge so you can be warned now before it's too late. This is a condensed version of a larger book that I also wrote. I can give you a free copy of that if you write to me at the contact info toward the end of this book.

May God be with you as you read,

Mike Murphy

1. The Source of it All

The first thing to get clear is that we can't do any good in ourselves; we must have the power of the Holy Spirit in control to do any good. For that matter we need the Holy Spirit moving in us to even have the desire to do any good. The first thing you should always do when convicted of something is confess any shortcomings to God and ask Him to help you do better. In fact at one time in my life I was lead to just ask God to show me how much I needed to grow in Him, even though I didn't think I needed to. That was a real turning point. He led me to the point where I wanted to do His will, but I still hadn't discovered the power of the Holy Spirit to do so. I learned this lesson after years of trying to be good on my own. I finally learned it after studying Romans fervently.

TRAIL OF REASONING ON SPIRIT LIVING IN ROMANS

- Chapter 5 talks about how we were all born with a sinful nature.
- Chapter 6 talks about the choice we have, to live by the sinful nature which leads to death, or the Spirit which leads to life.

²³"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

- Chapter 7 talks about Paul's struggle to do God's will and how his sinful nature kept making him do the opposite. Toward the end of the chapter he

asks, and answers, 'who will rescue him from this sinful nature?' Then he builds on that in chapter 8.

²⁰ "Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ... ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Before I go into the victory he found in Romans chapter 8, let me point out that Paul already had a fervent desire to serve the Lord in chapter 7. Remember I too had this desire before I learned how to carry it out. So asking God to give you, or someone else, this desire to grow is a good starting point to a victorious Christian life. If it's sincere I know God will answer it. Just keep following His leading with obedience. After God gives you a strong desire to obey Him, then He'll teach you to rely on His Holy Spirit to do so, as we see in the next chapter of Romans.

- Chapter 8 has a whole new tone where he talks about his victory over the sinful nature thanks to the Holy Spirit.

³ "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. ⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. ¹² Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

This goes along with Ephesians:

²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22)

The key that I have found is that you have to understand it to the point that you believe He'll do it - just like it is with salvation. Then you will pray in faith that He will crucify the sinful nature and fill you with the Holy Spirit, which is evident in the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5: love, joy, peace...). No trying to do it on your own. Just total surrender and trust in Him with a childlike expecting faith, while you obey the things you know you need to do (which is basically just seeking Him through Bible study and prayer initially).

In summary, if you ever see the need to live more fervently for the Lord (from this book or otherwise), remember to just confess your shortcoming to Him and ask Him to help you change. Follow up with obedience on your part - for example, Bible Study and much prayer. Your obedience alone won't change you. Reading the Bible alone won't change you. God Himself will change you when He sees your obedience as you stay in faith and obedience. The more you obey, the more faith you'll have and the more He can do. It's an exciting journey and eternity with Him at the end. It is well worth giving up the temporary and destructive pleasures of sin for a season and the fickle popularity of people (yes you will be persecuted; that's the only down side. See 2 Tim 3:12).

2. Works: Before or After. That is the Question.

Many today are teaching a salvation by grace and faith alone, with no works or obedience ever required. Even good ministries that encourage Christian service, for some reason will wince at the idea that works or obedience are required of a Christian; it just doesn't sit well with them. Why such reluctance? I believe it is the result of all the abuse of works and our overreaction to it.

Unfortunately, the abuse of a good principle is common. For the principle of works, an example would be cults that require doing their made-up (false) works for people to be saved. People being unloving and attacking or unkindly judging each other over actions is another abuse. People trying to get to heaven by works but without the saving relationship with Jesus is another. (The Pharisees did all 3 of these). However, we never toss out "the baby with the bathwater" in the abuse of other biblical principles as it seems we have with the works issue. For example we still believe in faith even though some prominent teachers try to use faith to buy fancy jet airplanes and such.

So why is there such reluctance over the biblical principle of being saved by faith, but that works (obedience) are expected afterwards? James makes it perfectly clear that "faith without works is dead." There are over 60 scriptures in this book that clearly indicate that obedience or works are required of a Christian. There are even verses that clearly call for a very fervent life of serving God by dying to yourself. Many of Jesus' parables were about actions, as we'll see. So it's clear there is plenty of support for this idea. What we are going to see is that this huge debate, which started as a result of the abuse of works, lies in a small handful of out-of-context verses and verses that condemn false works, which are either man-made works or good works done in the wrong order (before salvation).

One of the most famous passages that is usually used to justify salvation without works actually mentions works:

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Many people stop there but the very next verse reads:

¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Let's look at where the confusion came from. The term "by faith alone" (in Latin: Sola fide) has become common because of Martin Luther's ministry. Luther was fighting against FALSE WORKS that the church had set up just as the apostle Paul fought against the false works that the Jews had set up. That is one of the key differences; what are the "works" - are they true works or false works the church made up. And it's what set the debate in motion.

Martin Luther, was so opposed to works that he removed the book of James from his Bible translation and added "faith alone" to Romans 3:28 to help make his point. (This term "faith alone" is actually nowhere in the Bible, except maybe James 2:24 which is close and says we are NOT saved by faith alone.) There are a lot of surprising things about Luther that are coming to light which cause serious doubt on his character. But at least he could, at one point in his life, distinguish between a false faith and a true faith. He clearly wasn't opposed to works after salvation. He said:

"Faith must of course be sincere. It must be a faith that performs good works through love. If faith lacks love it is not true faith. ... the Apostle declares that without fruits faith serves no purpose. To think, "If faith justifies without works, let us work nothing," is to despise the grace of God. Idle faith is not justifying faith. In this terse manner Paul presents the whole life of a Christian. Inwardly it consists in faith towards God, outwardly in love towards our fellow-men."

John Calvin is another very questionable church leader, even supporting the death sentence for mere theological differences. By some strange irony he has become the figure-head of a movement that abhors works and promotes "eternal security" without any concern for actions or theological differences (talk about opposites). Clearly he didn't support this, as he said:

"I wish the reader to understand that as often as we mention Faith alone in this question, we are not thinking of a dead faith, which worketh not by love, but holding faith to be the only cause of justification. (Galatians 5:6; Romans 3:22.) It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone: just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth, and yet in the sun it is not alone, because it is constantly conjoined with light"

So really in essence they believed in required obedience, just after salvation. Many of Jesus' parables also say works are required (Matthew chapters 7, 18, 21-25). So the Bible is clear that you have to obey God after believing in Him

and letting him renew your heart. This is quite different from trying to be saved by works, which the Bible condemns. The context is usually relying on the Old Testament Law. But it could also be works that a church sets up that aren't even in the Bible. So be sure you're getting your teaching from the Bible, don't do works to satisfy a church or organization, and rely on God for salvation by keeping your focus on Him and not the works. The Bible isn't at all against works when these cautions are maintained. In fact, it says they are required to show a true faith and gives strong warnings against idleness.

As I have mentioned, I have found over 60 scripture passages that support the notion that actions, obedience, repentance, taking our cross, etc. are required after salvation. It starts in the 3rd chapter of the New Testament in John the Baptist's preaching. In fact his message of repentance and producing good fruit is the first actual teaching/command of the New Testament, a fitting beginning to the gospel message.

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:8-10)

Then John goes on to mention the coming judgment. John was saying that even the Jews, chosen by God, needed to produce good fruit and not solely rely on their father Abraham. Paul summarizes his ministry to the elders of Ephesus and King Agrippa with similar statements, except that they clearly apply to all people:

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. (Acts 20:21)

First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." (Acts 26:20)

For that matter, it was also the essence of Jesus' ministry, summarized by Matthew as Jesus began His ministry:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matthew 4:17)

There are so many verses like this. Yet in spite of so many verses, many people believe in salvation by faith alone with no need for deeds, obedience, repentance, etc. This is not surprising as the church has often been in error due to the influences of the culture and/or the propensity of people to follow church leaders instead of the scriptures. The scriptures are clear that true works are needed. However there are other scriptures that do indeed talk about salvation by faith without any works. How do we explain this?

The centuries of confusion can easily be explained by just looking at the order of the works. Are they works for salvation or after it? Notice in the scripture

given above, Ephesians 2:8-10, works are condemned before salvation and supported after salvation. Two of these other passages also imply that deeds follow the salvation: “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance”, “prove their repentance by their deeds”. I’ll discuss this with many more scriptures in the following pages. Luther apparently never picked up on this crucial difference.

Do works save you? Of course not. Almost everybody agrees works in themselves cannot save you. The scriptures that condemn works are referring to works for salvation. The scriptures that support works are referring to works after salvation, and they are not to save you but are done out of obedience. It is just simply an obedience of following Jesus after salvation. That’s why the thief on the cross could go to heaven without works. When you don’t have the opportunity to obey, you are not disobeying. The deceit shifted over time from “do you need works/obedience to get saved”, one false extreme, to “do you ever need works/obedience”, the other false extreme.

Only Jesus can save us but He has made it clear He will only do so when we obey Him. Or, as James puts it, we are saved by Faith, yes, but a true faith will have works that follow. In fact it is God who moves in a person who is truly saved to even have the desire to do the good works. They are natural in a truly saved person. However you cut it, you can’t deny that works HAVE to be present. So works don’t save you but they can be used as a litmus test of a true faith and a true salvation. If you realize your life has been void of obedience, simply confess it to God and ask Him to work in you so you have the desire to do true works. He’ll lead you, guaranteed!

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13)

To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Colossians 1:29)

A DEEPER LOOK

Let’s look at this in more detail. What fuels this debate are two types of verses that can be taken out of context to support salvation by grace alone. The first type, which I haven’t discussed much yet, are simple verses that declare some truth of being saved by faith and leave out other details. Some claim this “proves” there is no more to it (while ignoring clearer verses). The second type are verses that condemn false works, as I’ve discussed briefly. Let’s look more closely at these two types of confusing verses:

1. Verses that declare salvation in simple terms
2. Verses that condemn false works:
 - a. Old Testament law
 - b. Good deeds FOR salvation, or before salvation.

TYPE 1: VERSES THAT DECLARE SALVATION IN SIMPLE TERMS

Let's address the first type. The Bible was not written as a law document. You know, those law documents where every sentence has to explain every deviation and caveat explicitly to the point that normal people can't understand them. When the Bible says "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" it is assuming you follow the rest of what it says elsewhere. It is trying to make the point that "everyone" can call on the Lord, and He saves everyone who calls. It didn't intend for you to make a new doctrine from the absence of other information and say "all you EVER have to do to be saved is call upon the name of the Lord". It didn't mean for you to read into the verse and say that since "calling" on Him is all that is mentioned, that's all you ever have to do.

The Bible was written in common vernacular. We all speak like this. If I was to say, "Get some bread at the grocery store," I would be assuming you understood there was more to it. You'd have to get there, which requires some kind of legal transportation and maybe a driver's license, insurance, gas, etc. Then you have to pay for it or you'll have big problems! "Get" can be accomplished with or without paying for it. I didn't even ask you if you had money when I made that statement, it was just assumed. All of this was assumed. It would be absurd for anyone to interpret my instructions literally and try to "get" the bread from the store without paying for it, just because I didn't mention that step.

Here's an example. The verse I mentioned earlier about everyone calling upon the Lord is in Romans 10 and Acts 2. They are quoting a passage from Joel chapter 2. Paul clearly uses it to show ALL can be saved.

¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:11-13)

Peter used it to explain that the filling of the Holy Spirit, which had just happened to them, was predicted long ago. The passage explains several things that will happen in the new covenant and last days. This verse was just part of that prophesy. It wasn't meant to stand alone at all or be the main point of his sermon. And as I mentioned, it only meant to say "everyone" who calls will be saved.

¹⁷ In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Acts 2:17-21)

However, when Peter finished his sermon and they asked him what they should do he says “Repent and be baptized.” (v 38) He didn’t even mention “calling” at all in this conclusion. It’s understood in the repenting. He called for repentance again in the next chapter after healing the beggar (Acts 3:19). Repentance of course is an act of turning away from sin and toward God in obedience. Paul added that we should prove our repentance with our deeds.

... I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.” (Acts 26:20b)

That’s how the Bible was written. The other details are mentioned elsewhere. That’s why it’s good to have so many books in the Bible that clarify certain points of the process. It is typical to get the full picture on topics by looking at the whole Bible. For example prayer. Jesus said in John 14:14 “You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it”. Later he clarifies in John 15:7 that if we remain in Him and His words remain in us this will happen. Then the apostle James further clarifies that we can’t ask with selfish motives (James 4:1-3). 1 Peter 3:12 clarifies that we can’t be doing evil. Luke 18:1-8 clarifies that we need to be persistent and keep on praying. And Matthew 6:5-15 give us several more instructions. If we tried to stand on any one of these verses we’d be missing other important details.

Another example would be Romans 10:9 compared to 2 Timothy 2:13. As Paul was arguing against the need to keep the Old Testament law in Romans 10, he said all you have to do is confess “Jesus is Lord” to be saved because the context was keeping the law. But in 2 Timothy he adds that whoever confesses Jesus must turn away from wickedness. This was assumed to be understood in Romans 10.

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

...Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness. (2 Timothy 2:19b)

One more example would be the letter to the Gentiles in Acts 15. The Jerusalem council only told the Gentiles to avoid some food practices and immorality. They assumed you wouldn’t murder, for example. Paul lists several more things that are clearly forbidden for Christians in 1 Corinthians 6.

So you have to read the Bible as a whole and not jump into lawyer mode when some information is left out of a verse and prove from that omission that it is not required. If you were to do that, you’d have a hard time explaining away the other verses that include the other information.

People certainly have been explaining these other verses away for a long time with very interesting “acrobatic” discussions – which brings us back to the teachings of men. I’m sure you’re aware of all the different doctrines and debates in Christianity, including many obvious deceivers. Therefore, you may naturally be skeptical of my exhortations because you believe men can make the Bible say anything they want. And yes that is true. However notice that the

method I use is to give a quick summary of what the passages are saying, then I list the passage to show you that it does say that, clearly with no extreme effort. There are many large portions of scriptures that clearly make my case. However there has been an enormous amount of effort from denominations to explain verses this way or that way. But the Bible never actually says what they are trying to make it say. For example the Bible never says that once you're saved you can't lose your salvation. Instead there are many verses that warn about falling away, and say that IF you hold to the end you will be saved. This is dangerous because it can lead people to believe they are saved when they aren't. It seems every denomination has at least one doctrine that they can't quite make a clear biblical case for without some acrobatic reasoning. They fill in the blanks that the Bible leaves out by explaining what it "actually" means. Or they explain unclear verses to their viewpoint. And then, amazingly, they totally explain away clear verses that contradict their teaching – that takes real effort. People study the teachings of men diligently to be able to do all this.

To illustrate, let me take the statement "get some bread at the store" a little further. It's confusing enough to make conclusions by an absence of information as I described earlier. However, this can be much more confusing if you take things out of context and redefine terms. "Bread" has sometimes been a term for "cash". Context would make it clear. If we had just been talking about needing money, then from the context you could clearly imply that I meant get some money at the store, like at the ATM at the store. You also have to take the character of the person into account. If I was a criminal and we had just had the same conversation about needing money ("bread") then you could think that I meant steal some money from the store. That is why it's always important to take verses in context and with the character of the author in light. If I am not a criminal and there was no context of needing money, you can reasonably know I just meant buy some bread. So without these other highly unusual circumstances it would take effort to misinterpret my instructions any other way.

The same is true with the Bible. You should allow the most natural interpretation based on the character of the person, in context, and in harmony with the other scriptures. Any interpretation that yields a lazy, sinful, or lethargic life would clearly be a misinterpretation because we have many clear verses that speak against that. And we know that the life of Paul didn't practice this; it's not his character. So Context, character, and other scriptures would all support a fervent life of service to God. It is important to stick to clear verses without redefining words, making arguments from missing information, or ignoring context and other verses. I'm actually not against denominations or doctrines. We just need to be real careful not to get too wrapped up in them. If we'd just stick to the clear scriptures we'd be so much better off. It would keep us plenty busy just living those out.

Therefore, you have to really be careful for the teachings of men. In their effort to draw people to their little groups they form strange doctrines (as Paul said would happen in Acts 20:30) and defend them fervently through all sorts of these strange methods. This is unfortunate, but if the Bible isn't clear otherwise,

they could be “disputable matters” of Romans 14 - not something to be divided over. But sacrificing essential truth to have unity, is worse than division. No matter how ear-tickling they may be, any teachings that encourage you to be unproductive, lazy, lukewarm, or even worse-to tolerate sin, should be soundly rebuked because there is so much scripture against it. It is not a disputable matter.

I realize I too am a man teaching (teachings of men). For one thing, I’m trying to offer a different perspective from what you’ve been taught by our culture. Remember how powerful the influence of the culture is, and how hard it is to shake free from it to see the truth (more on that in chapter 5). Also, I’ve tried to keep this book short, though using large amounts of scripture. I try to let the scriptures speak for themselves. In the end I’ll encourage you to read the Bible for yourself with both perspectives in light. Also refer to Chapter 14 to see that actually the teachings of men agreed with works for 1500 years.

TYPE 2: FALSE WORKS

The second type of verses that are used to say works are not required are the verses that correctly condemn works for salvation. However it’s important to notice two things: what the works are and in what order they are. When the New Testament condemns works, it is in the context of Old Testament Law or it is addressing works FOR or BEFORE salvation. Nowhere are true good deeds or works condemned when in the proper order (taking care of the widow and orphan, visiting the sick, making disciples, feeding the hungry, etc). Paul, and the other writers, and Jesus Himself, constantly exhort us to a totally sacrificial life and made it clear that works were part of the Christian life AFTER you are saved by grace through faith without works. (This initial event of salvation is also called justification.) James chapter 2 makes it clear that faith without works is dead.

Paul was always confronting those who insist that people must keep the Old Testament law. Notice in these verses the context of the Law being the “works”. These whole chapters have this context.

Also see Romans 3:21, Romans 9:30-32, Romans 10:5-7, Galatians 2:15-16, Galatians 3:10-11, and Philippians 3:9

Therefore, we can confidently conclude that works of the law cannot be used for salvation, it was only put into place until Jesus could be revealed (Galatians chapter 3). In fact no work can be used for salvation, it must come after salvation.

This brings us to the other false work. Let’s look at the order of the works now. Notice below that the context is what Abraham did before hand to please God. Paul uses it to show that we don’t have to do anything before salvation except have faith.

“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”
(Romans 4:3)

And in James we have this same exact event with Abraham. But James uses it to show that works must be present. You can see clearly that the difference is that the works must be present AFTER salvation. This verse also mentions Abraham's initial faith, but clarifies that it was followed by action.

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made COMPLETE by what he did. (James 2:22)

He was saved by faith and THEN the works came to complete it. It is like a validation of a true salvation. Notice that James doesn't say the works saves him but that the faith was made complete by the works. It was the true, completed faith, as evident by works, that saved him. By the purest evaluation we know the works themselves do not save us. They are, however, required obedience by the Father. Therefore, however you look at it, works must be present. Any true salvation will naturally have these works present. Not only because they are commanded, but a person who loves God will want to do them. If they are not present something was wrong with the salvation. Perhaps the person followed a false doctrine about salvation and didn't "count the cost" of becoming a disciple. So there is no fruit of a true salvation. Ray Comfort has a great sermon "True and False Conversions" on the internet.

Therefore, the best way to say it is that we are saved by faith, but any true faith will have works associated with it after God gives us a new heart with this desire. As James says "Faith without works is dead". James 2:14-26 makes this perfectly clear.

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ... ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ... ²⁰You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ... ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:14, 17-18, 20, 26)

The Apostle John also makes this same connection between faith (belief), love, and obedience in the whole book of 1 John. For example, 1 John 5:1-5 talks about all 3 together. When asked about loving our neighbor, Jesus gave us the actions of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 as an example. These verses also show how love and obedience follow faith:

... neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (cf. Galatians 5:6)

... to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (cf. Romans 1:5)

... so that all nations might believe and obey him (cf. Romans 16:26b)

... the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel ... (cf. 2 Cor 9:13)

... every act prompted by your faith. (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:11)

All the apostles certainly modeled this lifestyle and told us to follow them as they follow Christ, who set the pattern. (2 Corinthians 6:3-10)

Therefore, in conclusion, when we look at all the scriptures we see they are in agreement that we are saved by faith without works but then it is a matter of taking up your cross and following Jesus, making him Lord of your life and doing what He was doing. The works don't save you, but He does when you walk in obedience. He, being the very Son of God, showed the perfect example of what we should do.

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus... taking the very nature of a servant ... he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

Serving others brings the only true joy anyway. As always we can only do any deeds or works by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we find ourselves unfaithful in service, the first step is to simply confess it and ask Him to help us; He certainly will. Then just do what you know you need to do; He'll lead you into the next steps. The first steps should be Bible study and prayer and letting your light shine. Also, stop doing anything that your conscience convicts you of.

3. Is Salvation an Event or a Life-Long Process?

A related question would be, is salvation easy or hard? Paul was constantly condemning Old Testament “works” to gain salvation. Some have latched onto these verses where he condemns the works of the law and say this applies to all works. And so they believe salvation is easy. But when you look closely you see throughout the whole New Testament two sets of verses: those that deal with how easy it is to GET saved and another set that talks about the requirements to STAY saved, or FOR salvation and AFTER salvation as I've explained. All the scriptures that talk only of believing or how easy it is are referring to the “getting” saved, and all the scriptures that speak of works, deeds, carrying the cross, and difficulty of salvation are referring to living it out. LIVING out the salvation is serious and challenging and takes sacrifice as the Holy Spirit helps us.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. (Hebrews 4:1)

Be careful that you don't let anyone rob you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the elements of the world, and not after Christ. (Colossians 2:8, WEB)

One of the interesting things that has come out of this easy salvation teaching is problems with assurance of salvation. There have been all kinds of doctrines developed by men that try to assure people they are saved; for example the

most famous one: "Once saved always saved". You've probably heard stories about how people put up a plaque or drive a board in the ground with the date they were saved and "take Satan" to show him the date when "he messes with their conscience". Doubts are indeed a tool of Satan but this could also be God doing the convicting because this whole idea of clinging to a date is not in the Bible. In the last chapter we talked about John tying faith and works together. John addresses this very idea of doubting our salvation in that same book. He says we need to have a clean conscience and a life of fruit by the power of the Spirit, and that assure us of our salvation. So it must be detectable. We can also see this from other scriptures. The Holy Spirit gives us power over sin (Romans 7 and 8), which leads to works (James 2), producing fruit through us (Luke 8, Matthew 7) and in us (Galatians 5). So we don't need to cling to a date. If a person has no fruits or good works, according to the scriptures he has good reason to doubt.

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴ The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:3-6)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." ²¹ "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. (1 John 3:16-24)

Notice that actions, love, and faith are working together and this is how we have assurance of our salvation. Remember it is the prompting and the power of the Holy Spirit that moves us to action. Also notice that the Holy Spirit assures us that God lives in us. This is because the Holy Spirit produces the fruits of the Spirit. Later John clarifies that it was for assurance of salvation that he wrote the book.

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

With the exception of the two types of verses I discussed in the last chapter, the New Testament always talks of the Christian life in terms of obedience, deeds,

and action. The goats and sheep in Matthew 25 were separated by actions, as were those who received the talents, as I'll go into more detail later. As Jesus was praising and rebuking the churches in the book of revelation he talks all about actions, not belief or faith by itself. Below is a chart of what Jesus said to the various churches in Revelation. Notice how much he talks about deeds, perseverance, and overcoming.

"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance." (Rev. 2:2)

"I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first." (cf Rev. 2:19)

I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent... (cf. Rev. 3:1-3)

⁸ I know your deeds. ... I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. (cf Rev. 3:7,8)

¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. (cf Rev. 3:14-16)

For the complete list of verses that talk about required actions see the appendix. The selected verses below specifically mention that finding eternal life is associated with our action. As I have discussed, there are other verses that do speak of finding eternal life through faith but they should be combined with these, to see that both faith and action are needed.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it ... he will reward each person according to what he has done. (Matt. 16:24-27)

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:9-10)

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (John 12:25-26)

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.
⁸The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:7-10)

Therefore, as John said in his epistle, we can have assurance of our salvation by faithful obedience to God's commands, not falling away, seeing the fruits of the Spirit, and by loving others with action. It all boils down to what Jesus said is the greatest two commands. In Luke He follows with the story of the Good Samaritan as an example of love in action. Don't you just love the simplicity of Jesus' profound wisdom! No councils, no dissertations, just simple instructions. If we'd just obey them we'd be all right.

[a teacher] asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷ He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' " ²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." (cf. Luke 10:25-37)

4. Seeking: Our Job

The Christian life is a great partnership between us and God. As I discussed in the first chapter, we have to learn to rely on God and not ourselves. But we can't sit back and do nothing. Our part is seeking. God has already made himself known by His creation (Psalms 19, Romans 1), our conscience and his written Word. Therefore, He has already taken the first steps. Now He is waiting on our obedience to seek Him. Here are scriptures that show God is waiting for us to seek Him:

God did this [created us] so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:27)

See also: Deuteronomy 4:25-30, Jeremiah 29:11-14, 1 Chronicles 28:8-10, 2 Chronicles 15:1-4, 2 Chronicles 20:2-4, Psalms 78:32-36, Matthew 2:1-2, Proverbs 8:17, Psalms 119:2, Proverbs 11:27, Psalm 10:4, Psalms 24:1-6, Isaiah 55:6-7, Lamentations 3:25, Matthew 6:25-34, Matthew 7:7-8, Luke 11:9-10, Hebrews 11:6, James 4:4-10, Romans 2:7-8, Romans 3:10-12, Hebrews 3:7-19.

When we respond to God's grace He gives more of it (Proverbs 28:14, Matthew 13:11-17, Matthew 25:28-30, Acts 28:24-28, Hebrews 3:7-9). When we reject it, it stops - to the point that our hearts get hard. Therefore make sure you always keep seeking and responding to God's convictions.

The activity of seeking is a real fundamental element of a sincere Christian. All sincere Christians will be seeking in some way. Notice in Philippians 3:12-21 that sincere Christians are not perfect but are always pressing forward, whereas insincere ones just have their mind on earthly things.

5. Is the Majority Usually Right?

One of the things that causes so many people to live in error is that people tend to follow each other like sheep and are easily persuaded to do wrong.

We see that with Jesus. On Palm Sunday the crowds were hailing him as King, on Friday with just a little bit of persuasion from the Jewish leaders they were calling for his crucifixion. The same type of thing happened to Paul in Lystra, as recorded in Acts 14.

As I discussed in the introduction, Christians of every generation have had to be careful that popular culture has not affected their view of Christianity, but look only to the Bible for guidance. Throughout history Christians have participated in wrongdoing in direct contradiction to Scripture. And it goes on. Even today Christians are embracing things contrary to Scripture.

It of course doesn't only apply to Christians. Propaganda, now called "public relations", is a well researched field of study. It has been heavily used in wars and crucially relied on in advertising and politics. This was infamously seen in the 1920's cigarette advertising, where "20,679 doctors" implied smoking was okay. In 1929 famous propagandist Edward Bernays, nephew to Sigmund Freud, launched a successful ad campaign that brought women into the smoking arena and doubled cigarette sales. Before this smoking was seen as unbecoming for women. He successfully hoodwinked the women to connect cigarette smoking to liberation, calling cigarettes "torches of freedom". He also launched successful campaigns on the American people to convince the public that "bacon and eggs" was the true all-American breakfast (Did you fall for that one?), and even that green was the most fashionable color in the 1930's so that Lucky Strike cigarettes, which had green packaging, retained its female clientele.

In a 2002 BBC interview, Bernays's daughter Anne, said of her father "I don't think he felt that all those publics out there had reliable judgment. That they very easily might vote for the wrong man or want the wrong thing. So they had to be guided from above. It's enlightened despotism." In his 1928 book "Propaganda" Edward Bernays wrote:

"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country."

And he proved the masses didn't have reliable judgment because it was easy to manipulate them. (Souce: Wikipedia contributors. "Edward Bernays." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 1 Sep. 2015. Web. 5 Sep. 2015.)

Voting: Voting today is almost always by majority opinion, which is of course based on the thinking that the majority is right. However in the Bible the people select only the candidates and God selects the right one.

Aaron's rod that had budded (Numbers 17:6-8)

The Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30, 1 Samuel 14:41-42)

Peter casting lots (Acts 1:23-26)

Standing alone for the truth

The road to heaven is a narrow one. God clearly wants us to stand alone for the truth. We are supposed to be different from our society.

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matthew 7:13, 14)

See also Hebrews 3:13-16, James 4:4, 1 John 3:1, 1 John 3:13, Romans 12:2, John 15:18-21

Persecution: Standing alone for the truth will not make you popular and you will face persecution, but God says to rejoice when people hate you (Matthew 5:11-12, 1 Peter 4:3-5). The Pharisees are the ones who love popularity (Matthew 23:6). As with most Biblical principles it is the future that is important.

The power of peer pressure is a constant and powerful force that appears to plague us our whole lives, not just during adolescence. This is so clearly seen in the ever-changing fads that people follow like sheep. People, even adults, like to look and act like others. If you recognize this it will help you be more cautious when it comes to truth about God. You need to prepare yourself to think independently from what you've always heard, and from group and denominational persuasions, as you read the Bible.

6. Why Should We Live Totally 100% for God?

...and not waste our lives with meaninglessness.

First, some examples of what is living for God:

- Visit lonely people in hospitals, nursing homes, & prisons.
- Help the needy with their needs (giving or helping).
- Interact with the community in various ways to shine light.
- Learn a language and take mission trips,
- Exhort other Christians in living more productive lives.
- Get better educated on evolution, moral issues, or false religions and exhort others in the truth.
- Plenty of personal and family Bible study.

- Do powerful work on your knees by fervently “wrestling” in prayer for everybody you know (friends, family, government, persecuted church) for all kinds of needs: spiritual growth, fruit, protection, guidance. (Col. 4:12)
- In all the routine events of life you can keep the eternal perspective in mind. Stay in prayer, looking for opportunities to let your light shine.

Or in summary: take care of the needy, widows and orphans, win the lost, make disciples, counsel new Christians, be salt, and practice good deeds to let your light shine.

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Peter 2:12)

Reasons:

- 1) The Bible commands it.

I am using many scriptures to show this, which is by far the most important reason. “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it.” However the idea in this chapter is to show why it is also reasonably the right thing to do.

- 2) We are grateful to God for what he has done.

He has paid a very high price to save people, but he has given us the command to tell others about it. What he did is worthless if we don’t spread the word. He has chosen to use us as partners. We should be grateful for what he has done and gladly do what he asks. To help you be more grateful think of how hopeless you would be without the hope of eternal life. Think of being eternally separated from your loved ones.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

- 3) To have a fulfilling, challenging, & exciting life

I saw a mission promo clip one time that said a missionary experiences more in life before noon than most people experience in their whole lifetime (all the interesting things you experience in another culture, learning new customs, seeing lives transformed by the power of God). This is of course hyperbole, but from spending time with missionary families, I believe the intent of this message is true. Their life is not always pleasant but it is always full.

But even if you can’t be a missionary, you can have the exciting privilege of working with THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE in challenging spiritual warfare, seeing God work and change people from people with no hope or future to the joy of God’s love and eternal life. Working with people for God is interesting enough by itself (even if they’re already saved). See Appendix 2 for how serving in a nursing home ministry has blessed us.

- 4) To have a meaningful life that makes a difference.

A good story is told on the internet about “the dash” between the year of birth and death and what you make of it (ie. 1904-1984). Fill that dash up with as much consequential stuff as possible.

Dr. James Dobson, with all his studies of people, said in his book *Life on the Edge*: “At the end of your life there are only three things that really matter.”

Who you loved, Who loved you, What have you done for the Lord

I can guarantee people never talk about spending 78,000 hours in front of the TV watching 600,000 violent acts. (Source: BLS American Time Use Survey, A.C. Nielsen Co. The 2nd number is multiplied up to an 80 year life expectancy.)

In fact even accomplishing significant things of a non-eternal nature (i.e. developing a big company) really doesn't mean too much in eternal perspective. But the eternal things you've done for God matter immensely at the end of life.

In light of all this the conclusion should be obvious: do something for the Lord and live fervently for Him. I hope you are seeing from logic and all the scriptures that the level of fervency should be quite a bit higher than what has become commonplace in modern Christianity. I mean Paul was even reluctant to encourage people to marry because it would make them less fruitful. He said it was a great thing and people should have their own spouse because of the immorality. But he did say that if someone had the ability to control them self they should remain single so they could be more fruitful for God. Jesus also endorsed this idea in Matthew 19:12. If they would encourage putting off a very fine institution like marriage for someone to be more fruitful, how much more do you think they would encourage us to put off any other frivolous activities. Even if they're not “bad” we should be super careful with any that waste time. More on that in the next chapter.

A debilitating mistake many make is they don't feel “called” to “the ministry”. However, we see the Bible is full of admonitions for everybody to die to themselves and live for Him. He has already given plenty of commands; He's just silently waiting for us to follow. Just find something to do and watch Him work in you. Don't wait for some kind of sign first. You've heard the term “it's hard to steer a parked car”. Just get moving and He will start steering (as you pray for His help and guidance).

7. Living 100% for God. (Okay 90% ... 70%? ...)

As an engineer I'm used to dealing with percentages to help me understand something: A product is 80% reliable, 30% more powerful, or 60% efficient. Called “performance metrics”, they are very useful for determining the condition of something. So when discussing how much we should live for the Lord it's easy for me to use percentages. It seems to me that most people agree they should live for God and say He's the “Lord” of their lives. However, when you examine their activities, they actually live about 90% for themselves and maybe

10% for God. For example, they go to church once a week and the really serious ones might help in a once-a-week ministry (i.e. teaching Sunday School). Let's say with preparation time for this weekly ministry that's a total of 5 hours a week (a generous estimate). If you have around 3 hours of free time a night and 12 hours on Saturday and Sunday that's a rounded 40 hours per week of 100% complete discretionary time that doesn't including sleep, work, driving, eating, etc. These other things are necessary, so the discretionary time one has would be a fair baseline in determining what is important to a person. Therefore, in our example, even the fairly serious Christians are only living a paltry 12% (5÷40) for God.

What we see in many of the scriptures and all the examples of people in the New Testament is much more fervency. As you read the scriptures I include in this book notice the call to total commitment. Take for example the parables of the treasure and pearls in Matthew 13, they sold all they had in return for the kingdom. I don't think it's wrong to take "some" time for ourselves but it shouldn't be the main thing. In other words we should aim to live for God about 80-90% of the time and the rest for us. He should be the focus of our life. We should consider Him in our recreation, our entertainment, our possessions, our occupation, etc. We can either choose to swap less meaningful activities for more meaningful ones or we can somehow bring God into the things we are doing. It is what gives the greatest joy anyway, if you'll just let God work in you to have this desire.

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.
(Psalms 37:4)

Stephen Manley has the best sermon I've ever heard on the topic of how and why we should live totally for God. He starts by telling how we can live for God in all kinds of circumstances, like work, boating or even sleeping (you'll have to listen to the sermon to see how you can "sleep for God"). Then he shows you why we should do so in a much more compelling way than I did in the last chapter. It's done in a very humorous and passionate way so it's very enjoyable to watch. Search YouTube for "How valuable is Jesus to you".

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6MBKZlYyv3LiFu0TjGlqFthwZsmXME>

Here's a hyperbole story to help illustrate.

The day I argued with God

For God loved us so much that He sent His Son to live a simple life and die a terrible death for us. He asks us to take up OUR cross and follow Him.

He says, "Visit those that are sick" and we say "but this show is on TV tonight."

He says, "Visit those that are in prison" and we say "but this is half price movie night at the theater."

He says "take care of the widow" and we say "our ball practice is tonight."

He says “take care of the orphan” and we say “our other practice is tonight.”

He says “feed my lambs” and we say “our game is today.”

He says “go and tell the lost and perishing of eternal life that I gave my life to purchase for them” and we say “we’re spending the day as a family at the amusement park.”

He says “give to the poor” and we say “but I want a nicer car.”

He says “spend some time with me in prayer” and we say “I’d rather call my friends.”

He says “study my word” and we say “I’d rather do some pleasure reading.”

He says “meditate on my word while you eat” and we say “I need to check Facebook.”

He says “go into the world and make disciples” ... and we simply say ... “we’re busy.”

... So He says sadly ... “if you died with me you could have lived with me” (Romans 6) but as it is, I never knew you. You have gained the world but lost your soul.”

So we joined the rest of the world, lost forever, while we enjoyed our one life.

This is not about working your way to heaven. You can do all these good things mentioned in this story and still not know Him, so yes you do need to have a personal saving walk with Him. However, that salvation should lead to a desire to do these things. You just need to discipline yourself to avoid picking up all these weeds. Rest assured, people will encourage you to participate in more and more of these time-wasting recreational activities. Most of them by themselves are not wrong, but when they all work together as weeds, so that they choke out the seed (Luke 8), that’s when you are in danger of losing your soul. (Matthew 16:24-27)

I challenge you to just ask yourself these questions:

1. How much time do you spend in godly pursuit in a typical week
2. How much time do you spend in recreation? ... Entertainment?
3. Can you integrate some kind of godly activity into any of your activities?
4. Are your recreational/entertainment activities yielding good results? Can you trim any back, even a little? Some can actually be quite grueling.

8. How Serious Is Sin?

Ray Comfort and Kirk Cameron told this story on their “Way of the Master” show:

“The Crocodile Story”

There once was a boy who wanted to go fishing at a lake, but his dad told him to stay away from the lake because there was a huge crocodile. The boy loved

his father but didn't listen, and he went anyway. He managed to sneak away while he thought his father wasn't looking, got into a boat and floated off shore. Suddenly, he saw a huge crocodile swimming around the boat. Just as the crocodile was about to attack, his father dove in and distracted the crocodile long enough for the boy to make it back to land. Unfortunately, his father was killed. Think for a second what the boy must have thought about that little fishing trip afterward? Do you think he'd want to go back? That's how we should see sin. We should treat it with total disdain because of what it cost our Savior. We should also see how serious it is.

Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. (Romans 12:9b, emphasis added)

Sin and evil are the enemy of the soul, it's like cancer. And we should take it very seriously. We clearly see how serious sin is because Jesus had to come and die for our sins so we could be forgiven; if it was a small thing it wouldn't have taken such a serious sacrifice. Jesus also taught on how serious it was:

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! (Matthew 18:6-7)

"Have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." Is this a loving thing to say? Yes! Because, you see, the focus is on the soul, and God wants all people to be saved. He takes it real serious when people lead others astray to eternal damnation. This whole chapter would not make sense if sin was easily forgiven (past, present and future) by Jesus' sacrifice. If Jesus' sacrifice forgives all sins over and over as needed, then why make such a big deal about sin as this passage does. Just focus on getting people to His forgiveness and it'll all be covered (many churches do exactly that). The chapter only makes sense if Jesus came to not only forgive but also defeat sin in us. We are not to continue in sin. The book of Romans, Hebrews, and 1 John make this clear.

...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹
No one who is born of God will continue to sin, ... (cf. 1 John 3:7-10)

But then Jesus goes on in Matthew 18 with even more detail to show both the seriousness of sin, and that the soul is way more important than the body:

⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin (cf. Matthew 18:8-9)

Whoa Whoa Whoa!! Now we're cutting our hands off? What's the big fuss?? What about forgiveness??? So you see, it's not all about forgiveness of sin but forgiving AND defeating sin. That's the only way this passage makes sense.

YES! SIN IS VERY SERIOUS!!

Realizing how serious God takes sin, will have the following effects on a person's life, the more serious he takes it the more these will be true:

1. Hate evil

... hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. (cf. Jude 1:23)

See also Romans 12:9b (quoted earlier), Psalm 97:10, Romans 12:9, Proverbs 8:13, Proverbs 16:6, Amos 5:15, Psalm 15:1, 2, 4, Proverbs 14:16

2. Ask for protection from evil: John 17:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, Matthew 6:13, Matthew 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 3:5.

3. Be Very cautious: Romans 16:19b, 2 Corinthians 2:11, Ephesians 6:11-18, Hebrews 12:1

Be very careful, then, how you live —not as unwise but as wise, (Ephesians 5:15)

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

4. Choose friendships and partnerships carefully. Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 14:7, Proverbs 22:24-25, 1 Corinthians 5:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14-17

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. (2 Thessalonians 3:6)

5. Warn others

Hell and sin will be more real when you realize how serious God takes sin. If you have a petty view of sin, you may tend to have a soft view of His punishment for it and not take it as seriously, and so you won't warn others.

The early Christians took it seriously. The result is the New Testament. It is full of scriptures warning us and teaching us about sin, obedience, the wrath to come, etc. The passage in Matthew 18 that I have already included in this chapter is a good example of the fervency Jesus Himself had in warning us. These scriptures below are those telling us to now go and warn others.

See Hebrews 12:14-29, Hebrews 3:12-14, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, and Ephesians 5:8-17

It's clear from the scriptures that God takes sin very seriously so we should abhor it. When we marry Christ it's like any other marriage, we should forsake all others, especially things against Him and contrary to His teaching. We understand this perfectly well in the natural realm. No one expects to marry someone and then date other people on the side. I hope you can see God takes sin that seriously and so we should therefor abhor it, whether it's in our entertainment or our actions.

9. Should Grace Inspire Us to Works or Comfort/Relaxation?

Here are six MAJOR discourses (large portions of scripture) on the grace, love and mercy of God which all conclude with a call to fervent living for God, or works. I've listed many scriptures before that tell how works are REQUIRED by

God after salvation but these verses below show that the love and grace of God are what DRIVES us to good deeds.

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his KINDNESS, TOLERANCE AND PATIENCE, not realizing that God's KINDNESS **leads** you toward repentance? (Romans 2:4)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1)

See also 2 Corinthians 6:1

It's not that we have to, but we SHOULD want to. If you find yourself not wanting to, simply confess it and ask Him to change your heart. It is certainly a prayer he will surely answer if you keep praying it and seeking him. We actually have to rely on His power and Grace to even have the desire for these things. See 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, and Philippians 2:12b-13.

DISCOURSE NUMBER ONE, Ephesians 2:1-10

The theme of grace and then works continues in chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians. The beginning of chapter 4 speaks of grace and what Jesus did. The rest of chapters 4 and 5 give strong exhortations to godly living (i.e. "insist on it in the Lord" in chapter 4 verse 17). To save room I won't cite the whole section but here are some highlight verses.

DISCOURSE NUMBER TWO It repeats in both Chapters 2 & 3 of Titus. So here's a great discourse on God's mercy that he has freely given us without us doing anything, and this time Paul actually clearly states the reason for stressing it. To relax and take comfort? No. NOT to be lax, but to be "careful to devote themselves to doing what is good".

DISCOURSE NUMBER THREE Peter says the same thing in 1 PETER 1:3-25 and 1 Peter 2:11-21. Notice how he too ties grace to our action. He gives a large discourse on the grace of God, then he transitions with the word "therefore" in Chapter 1, vs 13 and gives exhortations to godly living for the rest of the book, ending with "I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it" (Ch 5, vs 12).

DISCOURSE NUMBER FOUR The next discourse is in Hebrews 10:1-25. Notice in the first part of this section that the author is explaining the inadequacy of the law and talking all about what JESUS DID. Then it transitions with another "therefor" in verse 19 and encourages us to draw near to God with clean hearts, hold to our hope, and spur each other to good deeds.

DISCOURSE NUMBER FIVE In the book of Romans this is not seen in verses but in chapters. In the book of Romans, Paul presents the whole salvation plan in a great outline as I discussed in chapter 1. He lays out in the first 4 chapters how we are all, Jews and Gentiles, saved by faith just like Abraham discovered.

In Chapter five he gives details of how we have peace with Him through our justification and reconciliation because of his love and grace. After describing our sinful nature with the remainder of chapter 5, he stops in chapter 6 and firmly tells us what this grace is NOT for. It is not to go on sinning because we died to sin. He tells of his struggle with the flesh in chapter 7 and goes on to the victory over sin by the Spirit in chapter 8, and our obligation to live in the Spirit. After discussing God's grace on the Jews and Gentiles in chapters 9 through 11, he picks back up in chapter 12 with another "therefore":

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1)

And he spends the rest of the book exhorting them to various good works and obedience until he closes the book with his personal plans and greetings.

DISCOURSE NUMBER SIX This discourse in Galatians chapter 5 uses the term freedom. This is one of the places where Paul is fighting those trying to use the Law for salvation, a false work as I discussed earlier. The transition happens in verse 13.

This passage includes the verse that says "the one who sows to please his sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction". "Sowing" would mean indulging in thoughts and actions that please the sinful nature. 1 John 2:15-17 gives us a pretty good summary of these: "lusts of the flesh" (immorality/immodesty), "lusts of the eye" (materialism), and the "pride of life" (pride and bragging of accomplishments without God's help). This would include most of what the world offers for "entertainment" (or when you look at the root word for entertainment, it might be better understood as "enter into entanglement"- see Hebrews 12:1). However, "the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life". This would include prayer, Bible reading, memorizing and meditation on scripture, and serving others in many ways. The exhortations to various items of obedience actually continue all the way to chapter 6 verse 10, which concludes with yet another "therefore":

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:10)

THE WORD "GRACE" ITSELF

Even in singular verses that just mention the word grace, there is often an action associated with it. You've probably heard grace called "unmerited favor". The word "favor" can be confusing. This doesn't mean God just likes you when you don't deserve it, as the modern secular term would use it. I.e. "We did terrible but they gave us grace". Really this should be the word "mercy". In the Bible, God's "grace" is always about God giving something. And about half the time it refers to what he gives us undeservedly: mercy, forgiveness, etc. But the other half of the time it refers to power he gives us to serve others.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

Also see Acts 4:33, Acts 6:8, Acts 11:23, Acts 15:40, Romans 1:5, Romans 12:6, Romans 15:15, 2 Corinthians 1:12, 1 Corinthians 3:10, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 2:9, 2 Timothy 2:1 and many more. All these verses clearly show that grace is also power for ministry. Vines Dictionary is in agreement, calling this aspect of grace, “power and equipment for ministry”. In fact the Greek word is “charis” and it is where we get our word “charisma”, which denotes action. Do a concordance search and look up every verse that mentions grace. See if “unmerited provision” (for us or others) fits.

So the word grace would be better defined biblically as the “unmerited provision” of God. And as I’ve explained, clearly the expected outcome of God’s grace, from a biblical perspective, is grateful obedience and service. When you think of the term “grace” do you ever think of power to do good works? Would the image also include a serious, loving Father handing out important work assignments to save and help others and the power to do so? Or is it only what he’s done for us? This is a very fundamental attitude difference, which will define our whole outlook on Christianity and our actions - the change from thinking about what God can do for us, to what we can do for God out of gratefulness for all He’s done already.

10. Will Some Be Terribly Shocked to Find They Didn’t Make It?

Jesus told three terrifying stories where people get to the great white throne judgment and find out too late that they are going to the wrong place. In Luke he responds to a question of how many will be saved with one of these terrifying stories.

Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, ²⁴ “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ ²⁶ “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’ (Luke 13:23-27)

So even fellowshiping with Jesus (or at least thinking you are) and listening to his teaching doesn’t cut it. They were doing evil and didn’t really know him

although they ate and drank with him. Maybe it was a casual eating and drinking as he taught them but they never pursued the relationship further.

The same story is recorded in Matthew.

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. ¹⁵ “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. ²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who **does the will** of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (Matthew 7:13-23)

This is a surprising passage. Even though they were doing some seemingly amazing things (perhaps for show), we see clearly that they actually were not doing His will, didn’t have good fruit and were doing evil. He calls them evildoers in both of these stories. God takes evil very seriously (chapter 8). Crying Lord, Lord didn’t cut it either. It’s not just a “lip service”:

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. (Matthew 15:8-9)

It’s even in the Old Testament where people claim to acknowledge God but he rejects them based on their actions (Hosea 8:2-4). Therefore you have to know Him and do His will. What is His will? Here is a compilation of several verses for a good summary:

We are saved by grace “to do good works” (Eph 2:10) and we are to “encourage each other daily” against sin (Heb 3:13), “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that entangles” (Heb 12:1), Abhor evil (Romans 12:9), “not love the world or anything in it” (1 John 2:15), take care of the poor, the widow and the orphan (James 1), think about whatever is lovely and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8) and “deny ourselves and take up our cross” (Luke 9:23) until we “bear fruit” (John 15:1, Luke 8:15).

Or basically it’s living 100% for Jesus day by day, seeking Him and finding out what pleases Him (Eph 5:10) and doing it.

And as Paul said it’s not living for yourself anymore:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Good fruit is the goal:

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance ... ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 3:8, 10)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned... ¹⁰If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. (cf. John 15:1-10)

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. ⁴⁶"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. ⁴⁸He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. ⁴⁹But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete." (Luke 6:43-49)

In the famous parable of the sower and seeds, the seed that produced fruit is the only one that didn't die out (also found in Matthew 13:43-49):

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)

Jesus told two parables (building a tower, a king going to war) about how you have to count the cost before following Him. If you are not ready to give up everything you have, you can't follow Him. Like the fruitless branches cut off to be burned in John 15, here salt that is not salty can only be thrown out.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ... ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. ³⁴ Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out (cf. Luke 14)

These may be hard, even incredible, words for people in our lukewarm generation. However, keep in mind that following Jesus is very fulfilling after God fills you with love for people. See Appendix 2.

11. What Is God Like?

I read a very humorous and thought-provoking article online in Christianity Today by Drew Dyck, “Have We Forgotten the Holiness of God?” He talks about how the church has become enamored with the love, grace, and mercy of God in almost a gushy way, but it has forgotten He is also powerful and scary, like plutonium. He points out that the typical man-God encounter was one of fright or terror and “fainters abound” as he puts it.

See Isaiah 6:1-5, Daniel 5:5-6, Genesis 19:23-28, Exodus 7-12, Genesis 6-8, Acts 5:10-14, Acts 9:3-4, Hebrews 11:7, Hebrews 12:18-29, & Revelation 1:12.

We should live with reverential fear of God:

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. (Romans 11:22)

Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. (1 Peter 1:17)

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. (Psalms 111:10)

I also wanted to take this a step further and focus on the imbalance people may have developed regarding His love verses His wrath - for He does have both! You’ll hear lots of talk about His love but virtually nothing about His wrath. In fact the very term “the Wrath of God” seems Old Testament or outdated. It may even be kind of repulsive to some. But it is there and it will be deserved by anyone who faces it, because indeed He is a great God of patience, love and forgiveness. To get to God’s wrath we have to continually reject His pleading love, mercy and grace. But eventually he has to exercise his wrath as a result of His justice. This is clearly seen in John 3 where we find the famous verse on the love of God (John 3:16). It also mentions rejecting this love and facing his wrath. In fact, we are already under His wrath, due to unchangeable justice, and so He has offered His son as a sacrifice for us:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36)

Some more related verses:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Col. 3:5-6)

...live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (cf. Eph. 5:1-6)

This will happen on the Day of the Lord.

See, the **day of the LORD** is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. (Isaiah 13:9)

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them." (Malachi 4:1)

⁷ But the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:7 WEB)

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (Revelation 20:11-12)

Cf. Obadiah 1:15, 2 Corinthians 1:14, Acts 2:20

There have been times throughout history where this aspect of God has been taught. "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God" by Johnathan Edwards is a classic example, which yielded good fruits. In his time it was actually common to preach like that. Nowadays people will just scoff at that kind of preaching, calling it scare tactics. They have been emboldened by the overall lack of understanding of God's wrath. Also the tendency of man's fallen nature is to be proud for really no reason whatsoever. Cf. the book of Jude.

Another influencing factor must be evolution theory, causing doubt there is no God to fear at all. It's too much to discuss here, but the theory of evolution is

really an amazing propaganda machine. I saw it put best on a little internet quote:

Atheism: The belief that there was nothing and then nothing magically exploded for no reason, creating everything and then a bunch of everything magically rearranged itself for no reason whatsoever into self-replicating bits which then became dinosaurs.

Therefore, let's not take obedience lightly or forget the wrath of God because of our culture. But before we leave on a heavy note let's remind ourselves once again that this is not what God wants. In the same chapter where Jesus gave the millstone around the neck parable, he gave the parable about finding the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14). God has to take sin very seriously and punishment for it will be great but that is not His will for anyone. He has done everything He can to keep people from experiencing that wrath. Jesus intercedes for us (Heb 7:25, Rom 8:34) and God the Father seeks those who have wandered off.

12. Our Best Life Now? Should We Focus on Now or Eternity?

One of the most fundamental convictions that will drive all our actions is if we live for the now or for eternity. Jesus' focus, and that of everyone in the New Testament, has always been eternal, not temporal. There may have been some temporal focus in the Old Testament. For example you see examples of accumulating wealth as God's blessing. However this is clearly not carried over into the New Covenant. Instead the opposite is clearly taught and demonstrated in the New Testament. Money is always spoken of in terms of giving to others and accumulating it is condemned several times. Loving the things of the world is also condemned. The entire focus of the New Testament is God and eternity. Love, Joy, peace, contentment, fulfillment and these types of wonderful internal fruits are abundant so we have life to the full, but it is always only focused on these internal fruits and the blessed hope that we have to look forward to, not anything of a temporal nature.

Francis Chan gave a great illustration on this with his "eternity rope". He basically equated our whole life to a 1 inch section of a very long rope and how foolish it was to focus on that little inch and ignore the rest.

Jesus taught and demonstrated having an eternal focus. He left splendor and majesty and power in heaven to come and be born in a stable, live a modest life of service and eventual sacrifice FOR US. He did not live the "good life" while here, nor did any of the apostles. (This is one of the convincing differences of Christianity to show that it is the only sincere religion.)

Jesus' teaching on being eternal minded is clearly the foundation of the famous Sermon on the Mount - the first sermon recorded in the NT. There is clearly a "now" and "eternal" focus. Notice the lowly present condition but the glorious future condition in these verses:

Blessed are you who weep **now**, for you **will** laugh ... Woe to you who are well fed **now**, for you **will** go hungry. (cf. Luke 6:24-26)

The teaching goes on elsewhere, found in Luke:

... do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.
⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. (Luke 12:4b-5)

... In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33b)

Paul taught and modeled it:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1)

See also Philippians 3:12-21 (quoted earlier in chapter 4), 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, Hebrews 11, Hebrews 13:14, 1 Peter 1:13, 1 Peter 4:1-5, 2 Peter 3:10-12, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 and Psalms 37.

And after he's gone through (cf. 1 Corinthians chapters 6 and 11) this verse below is amusing. It's one of my favorite verses. He's arguing against those who say there is no resurrection and makes this passing comment that if there is no resurrection, we're suffering a whole lot for nothing and so we're to be pitied more than anyone on earth.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

The only thing you can take with you is PEOPLE!! That's all that counts!

13. A Little Drama - A Day with Jesus!

I saw this drama done at a church at least 20 years ago and it made a big impression on me. I've adapted it a little. It consists of two characters: Jesus, who has a non-speaking part, and an average guy who does all the talking.

Prologue: If someone were to grant you a wish that you could spend one day with anyone you please, who would it be? Of course we would say "Jesus!" Well here's a little skit called, "A Day with Jesus."

Skit: Aw Jesus this is just great to have you here. This is going to be so much fun. We can do all kinds of fun things together. ...

How about the first thing we do is go shopping for a new car? ... No mine's running fine but it's just that it's not brand new anymore and it sure doesn't impress anybody. It's just plain and boring. I want something that is flashy, fast, and fun! ... The poor! Aw man they could get a job if they wanted one. ... The poor in other countries! Well I just figure that must be your way of punishing them. ... You want to read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15? Okay. [he reads it]... So that was Christians supporting others in another country? ... So you mean I'm supposed to give up the surplus of my money to support people on the other side of the world! [looks sad, confused, and angry]

[pauses for a moment, then the bad expressions fade away] Well maybe we could watch TV. [clicks remote] Oh Hey, this is a good one. This is where he takes the ax and [Jesus quickly flinches and turns away]. Oh, I really didn't see that one, I just saw the preview. [clicks the remote] Okay, this is a good one, it is even based on true history, [Jesus turns his head] Well violence was a part of history.

Okay you'll really be proud of me for this one, it's my favorite TV evangelist. He preaches a lot about faith. He says if I have enough faith I can ask you for whatever I want and you'll do it. He says a test of faith is if I am willing to pay the tithe on it before I get it. So God will give me any amount of money I choose, if I give his ministry 10% of it up front. ... Greed!?

Well, there's this other guy over here, but I don't like him because he's boring. He just talks about the Bible, and I can read that for myself. ... Speaking of which, that's something I know you'll enjoy. Now let's see... where did I put it [looks everywhere, finally says...] Well I guess you don't need to read it, I mean you wrote it right! [looks at watch and looks nervous]

[Looks at watch again and says:] Well thanks for spending some time with me. I guess you need to go now since you've got so many people to take care of.

[Jesus just sits there.] No? Well okay, but I need to go somewhere. So you just wait here and I'll be back later, Okay? [He starts to leave and Jesus follows him] No, no, you don't need to come along I'll be okay.

[He takes another step and Jesus follows him again] No, please let me just do this by myself okay?

[He takes another step and Jesus follows him again. He goes back to the chairs with Jesus] Okay I'll be honest with you. I'm going to a party and the people there wouldn't know what to think of you. And I can't afford to lose their friendship. And besides there may be some things going on there that you wouldn't approve of. So I INSIST that you stay here. I'll be back before you know it and everything will be okay.

[He starts to leave again and Jesus still follows him again. He starts to look really distraught.] Look, why are you doing this to me? [He nails one hand of Jesus to the invisible cross] I mean I just need to have some fun every now and then. [He nails the other hand to the cross and walks off the stage. Jesus is just left hanging there]

Among many topics, this drama touches on giving to the poor. As I mentioned, in the New Testament hoarding and wealth are always condemned and giving any excess is constantly exhorted. There are 3 scriptures on giving to your pastor, 5 on giving to missionaries and traveling evangelists and 16 on giving to the needy. One thing though, when Jesus tells you He was hungry and asks if you fed Him, don't say you gave to the church. That is giving to the pastor, which is okay, but everyone does that, so the church has excess. But instead of giving to the poor, churches almost always keep it in the "storehouse" using it for nicer buildings and such. The best churches might give 10% to both missions and the needy. So if you want to give to the poor you'll need to do that directly. Christian Aid Ministries is a very modest and efficient organization, only taking 2.3% for administration and fundraising (up to 10% is considered reasonable). Check the stewardship efficiency for any large ministry on ECFA.org

14. Historical teachings on works

In Chapter 2 I mentioned the surprising quotes from the two sources that people usually associate with the faith alone movement: Martin Luther and John Calvin. This may indicate that they have been misunderstood and that even they believed in obedience after salvation. To further help you get off high-center and open your mind to the possibility that our culture has deviated substantially from the Bible on this issue, let me give you just a few more examples that support this idea that a life of obedience is required. The real evidence I'd like to offer is the scriptures. I don't place complete confidence in these teachings of men or subscribe to everything they say. But I give them as examples to show that required obedience is not just my interpretation of scripture.

Here's a small example from the famous Matthew Henry Commentary on 2 Peter 1:1-11:

Those who are diligent in the work of religion, shall have a triumphant entrance into that everlasting kingdom where Christ reigns, and they shall reign with him for ever and ever; and it is in the practice of every good work that we are to expect entrance to heaven. (Matthew Henry Commentary)

Or how about Justin Martyr in his famous second century classic: The First Apology of Justin Martyr, Chapter VIII (from the translation of Marcus Dods, D.D.)

“For, impelled by the desire of the eternal and pure life, we seek the abode that is with God, the Father and Creator of all, and hasten to confess our faith, persuaded and convinced as we are that they who have proved to God by their works that they followed Him, and loved to abide with Him where there is no sin to cause disturbance, can obtain these things. This, then, to speak shortly, is what we expect and have learned from Christ, and teach”

And below is a quote from Chapter XVI of the same work.

“And let those who are not found living as He taught, be understood to be no Christians, even though they profess with the lip the precepts of Christ; for not those who make profession, but those who do the works, shall be saved, according to His word: "Not every one who saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. For whosoever heareth Me, and doeth My sayings, heareth Him that sent Me. And many will say unto Me, Lord, Lord, have we not eaten and drunk in Thy name, and done wonders? And then will I say unto them, Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity. Then shall there be wailing and gnashing of teeth, when the righteous shall shine as the sun, and the wicked are sent into everlasting fire. For many shall come in My name, clothed outwardly in sheep's clothing, but inwardly being ravening wolves. By their works ye shall know them. And every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire."

It's actually easy to find such teachings before the reformation, when people took Luther's idea too far and the others gleefully followed in this ear tickling doctrine. You will indeed find quotes from early fathers who talk about being saved by faith, but again it goes back to that initial salvation, which if true, will have works following. You have to put both together for the complete picture. Here is a scattering of quotes from many early church fathers on the need for works and repentance after salvation.

To those who seek immortality by the patient exercise of good works, he will give everlasting life. Theophilus of Antioch, A.D. 181

When we hear, 'Your faith has saved you,' we do not understand the Lord to say simply that they will be saved who have believed in whatever manner, even if works have not followed. To begin with, it was to the Jews alone that he spoke this phrase, who had lived in accord with the law and blamelessly and who had lacked only faith in the Lord. Clement of Alexandria, Post A.D. 202

Whoever dies in his sins, even if he profess to believe in Christ, does not truly believe in him; and even if that which exists without works be called faith, such faith is dead in itself, as we read in the epistle bearing the name of James. Origen, A.D. 226-232

You, then, who are rich and wealthy, buy for yourself from Christ gold purified in fire, for with your filth, as if burned away in the fire; you can be like pure gold, if you are cleansed by almsgiving and by works of justice. Cyprian, A.D. 252

Faith without works of justice is not sufficient for salvation; neither is righteous living secure in itself of salvation, if it is disjoined from faith. Gregory of Nyssa, A.D. 335-394

He that believes in the Son has everlasting life." Is it enough, then, to believe in the Son,' someone will say, 'in order to have everlasting life?' By no means! Listen to Christ declare this himself when he says, 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord! Lord!" shall enter into the kingdom of heaven'; and the blasphemy against the Spirit is alone sufficient to cast him into hell. But why should I speak of a part of our teaching? For if a man believe rightly in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, but does not live rightly, his faith will avail him nothing toward salvation. John Chrysostom, A.D. 391

But since in the Law no one is justified before God, it is evident that the just man lives by faith.' It should be noted that he does not say that a man, a person, lives by faith, lest it be thought that he is condemning good works. Rather, he says the 'just' man lives by faith. He implies thereby that whoever would be faithful and would conduct his life according to the faith can in no other way arrive at the faith or live in it except first he be a just man of pure life, coming up to the faith by certain degrees. Jerome, A.D. 386

This is the original design of the Church of Christ. It is a body of men compacted together, in order, first, to save each his own soul; then to assist each other in working out their salvation; and, afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all men from present and future misery, to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and set up the kingdom of Christ. And this ought to be the continued care and endeavor of every member of his Church; otherwise he is not worthy to be called a member thereof, as he is not a living member of Christ. John Wesley, January 30, 1763

In his sermon "Scripture Way of Salvation", Wesley makes it clear that only faith is required for justification, but afterward works are required, "if there be time and opportunity for them", just as I said in chapter 2 – if you don't have the ability to obey you are not disobeying. If anyone "willingly rejects" good works "he cannot retain the grace of God" or "continue in the faith".

It is incumbent on all that are justified to be zealous of good works. And there are so necessary, that if a man willingly neglect them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified; he cannot grow in grace, in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot

retain the grace he has received; he cannot continue in faith, or in the favor of God.

Here are more modern examples (though rare): You can find the first two articles on the Answers In Genesis website, www.aig.com and Ray Comfort's message all over the internet.

"Are We Justified by Works or Faith?" by Chuck Mcknight

"Is My Love for the Lord Real?" by Rand Hummel

"True and False Salvations" by Ray Comfort

15. Summary: the Three Legged Stool

In summary, I see the Christian life with 3 major areas that work like a three legged stool; it won't work without all the legs.

1) The first of course is faith and asking for God's forgiveness and help to repent, followed by a close walk with God, a total focus and commitment to him with all your heart, mind, and soul. God will actually help you have this fervency if you confess your lack of it to Him. A life-long attitude of seeking Him is a critical foundation. Reading your Bible, lots of fervent prayer, and meditating on scripture are all very important in seeking Him. This strengthens your faith and you learn to let the Holy Spirit conquer sin. We have a sinful nature and if we try to conquer it by any number of steps or principles, but without the Holy Spirit, it won't work. This doesn't lead to laziness or worldliness but grateful, fervent, and joyful service "with His energy working through me" as Paul said.

2) The 2nd leg is you have to ABHOR sin and treat it seriously, even "small" things. I personally was seriously affected by my family not being more cautious with the TV, my influences (friends and youth groups), and my music. These things do feed the flesh, influence you badly, and plant images in your mind that are hard to forget. Certain types of music are designed to feed attitudes of wild recklessness, power, and pride. They play it at sports events, bars, and parties to set up those moods. It does the job. These things can cause problems that make you ineffective or even lead you astray. In addition to these scriptures below, look up the poem "Little Things" by Julia Fletcher Carney for more information. There were also many verses about hating evil in Chapter 8, "How Serious Is Sin."

Let those who love the LORD hate evil. (Psalms 97:10a)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may

see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Peter 2:11:12)

3) These last two verses above mention both the 2nd leg and 3rd leg. The 3rd leg is you have to develop good appetites of serving and reaching others for God. This is very fulfilling and in time easily replaces the vacuum of what you might take away in the 2nd leg. Most ministries I know focus on one or the other. They either focus real well on evangelism and reaching the world, but they don't abhor sin. Or they abhor sin but keep to themselves.

We should develop a life of serving God; it should be by far our main focus. It should be our joy and motivation in almost everything. If fun and entertainment is your motivation, you and your family will easily transition into mediocrity, emptiness, and possibly sin. Since the fun-seeking life is pretty empty, you always need more and more to satisfy and the world offers lots of dangerous and sinful things for fun. Therefore it's very easy to cross that line from simple harmless fun (which is okay in small amounts) into dangerous or sinful fun. I think many lukewarm parents have lost their children to the world because the family pursued fun and the children had to have more of it than the parents.

So find an elderly lady close by who needs some help in or around the house and have a blast helping her. Make it fun. Have pizza, play nice music, sing or tell stories while working, etc. Mission trips are great, too, of course. It's also okay to experience the importance of helping people week after week in a weekly ministry like a prison ministry, bus ministry, visitation, or nursing home even though it's not a "blast". In time you'll see how important it is and do it for that reason, not just when it's fun. We serve at a nursing home for our church service. We tell ourselves we're going to see Jesus today, because he said when you visit the sick you're visiting Him.

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. (John 21:15-17)

Matthew 24:36 through 25:46 (a passage that is 62 verses long!) is all about the return of Jesus and how he judges people – who is accepted and who is rejected. It follows his description of end times and what happens before His coming. I won't take the space to list all these verses, but below are the parables in this section.

Parables of Matthew chapters 24 and 25:

- 1) master of the house in charge of the servants
- 2) ten virgins

- 3) Talents
- 4) Sheep and goats

The second parable, about the ten virgins, talks about knowing Jesus, the first stool leg I mentioned. It is very important to develop that relationship. That is why we take time to read our Bible, pray (talking to Him), thanking Him, meditating on His words and constantly thinking about things above. This all builds relationship. We should also always be ready for His coming. The theme of this parable is to know Him and be ready.

The other 3 parables have a different focus. We know that “it is appointed to men once to die and then to face judgement” (Hebrews 9:27), but we don’t have a lot of details as to what will actually take place in that judgement, except for these 3 parables and a scattering of verses. These 3 parables are devoted solely to how Jesus will judge us. Notice that they all talk about actions. You can have actions without belief and Jesus addressed that as a problem elsewhere. However it is equally a problem to have faith without action. When we face Him on judgement day He’s going to be talking about actions. He’s either going to say “well done” or “depart from me” based on actions. Yes of course faith is involved and he taught a lot on that also, but on judgment day he’s going to be talking about actions. This is because true faith will lead to actions. So when he judges by these true works (not false works) he is judging faith at the same time.

The servants in the 1st and 3rd stories who were faithful with their talents heard these blessed words:

“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ (Matthew 25:23 WEB)

I wish I could include all of the 4th parable (Matthew 25:31-46) because it is so powerful. I’ll just include a couple verses from this eye-opening story of the sheep and goats. It is referencing what they did: Giving food and water, shelter, clothing, care for the sick, and visiting those in prison.

⁴⁵ “Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Most certainly I tell you, because you didn’t do it to one of the least of these, you didn’t do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:45-46 WEB)

Of 37 parables that Jesus told, 17 of them (see next page) were clearly about our actions (the others are about God’s love, or the kingdom, etc). Not a single one of them was only about believing. Belief is not an issue in any parable, everyone in the parables believe in the Master. The parables in bold additionally state that the subjects received dire punishment because of their inaction.

Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
The Lamp under a Bushel	5:14–15	4:21–25	8:16–18
Good Samaritan			10:25–37
The Friend at Night			11:5–8
The Rich Fool			12:16–21
Wise & Foolish Builders	7:24–27		6:46–49
Parable of the Sower	13:3–9	4:3–9	8:5–8
The Barren Fig Tree			13:6–9
Parable of the Pearl	13:45–46		
Drawing in the Net	13:47–50		
The Hidden Treasure	13:44		
Counting the Cost			14:28–33
The Unforgiving Servant	18:23–35		
The Master and Servant			17:7–10
The Wicked Tenants	21:33–41	12:1–9	20:9–16
The Faithful Servant	24:42–51	13:34–37	12:35–48
The Talents or Minas	25:14–30		19:12–27
The Sheep and the Goats	25:31–46		

CLOSING

Thanks for reading through to the end. I've tried to keep this book as short as possible. I'm not a theologian so I've written in common English and have relied mainly on the scriptures, not layers upon layers of man's teachings. Being trained as an engineer and not a minister I'm very open to the fact that I may have missed some terms or made other small mistakes. I would be glad to receive feedback at the e-mail below. However I am convinced that the overall point I make is correct. I hope you will keep this in mind as you read the Bible and see for yourselves what God wants of you. Stay in prayer too. And remember, being fervent for the Lord with His power working in you is very fulfilling and has many benefits, especially eternally.

May God guide you and keep you in His will,

Mike Murphy, Murphy316@aol.com

For further reading I'd recommend:

"Pursuit of A Godly Seed" (book and videos) by Denny Kenaston

"Keeping Your Child's Heart" and "Redeeming the Time" by Steve and Teri Maxwell of Titus2.com.

"Discipleship in the Home" by Matt Friedeman

“Fresh Wind Fresh Fire” by Jim Cymbala (Good focus on the crucial importance of prayer)

Appendix 1: Verses That Show Obedience Is Required of a Christian

This list does not include every exhortation to some act, attitude, or obedience. The New Testament is composed of many such verses so that list would be enormous. These are only the verses that indicate that the obedience is required. And it's not meant to be exhaustive. There are many others.

Some verses actually call for an extreme level of commitment, forsaking everything else and living only for God; others simply state that you can't go on sinning after you claim to be saved. All of them should be heeded. To do this the verses with the stronger message would set the bar and the weaker verses would be satisfied as well.

1 John 2:15-17; 2:28, 29; 2:3-6; 3:16-24; 3:4-10; 5:1-5; 1 Peter 4:1-5; 2 Cor 5:14-15; 5:9-10; 9:8; 2 Thes 1:7-9; Acts 10:34, 35; 20:20-21; 26:19-20; Ephesians 2:8-10; 5:5-6; 4:17-25; 6:7,8; Galatians 5:6, 16-25; 6:7-10; Hebrews 10:26-31; 12:14-29; 3:12-14; 6:7-11; 5:8-9; Isaiah 58:5-9; James 1:22-27; 2:14-26; 4:4-10; Jeremiah 17:10; John 12:25-26; 14:12; 14:21-24; 15:1-10; 21:15-17; 3:19-21; 5:28-29; Luke 13:22-27; 14:28-35; 6:43-49; 8:15 ; 9:23-26; Matthew 13:18-23; 15:8-9; 16:24-27; 18:6-9; 22:37-40; 24:36-25:46; 3:8-10; 7:13-23; 21:28-32; 5:20-24; Phil 2:12-13; Revelation 2:2, 19; 20:11-12; 22:9; 3:1, 7-8, 14; Romans 11:22; 2:5-13; 6 (whole chapter); Titus 1:16; 2:11-15

Appendix 2: Real Life Example of the Joy of service

I thought I'd share a real life example of how full and interesting the life of service is that I am encouraging by sharing about our experiences teaching at an assisted living center. Notice that there is nothing here that would indicate any great wisdom or skills on our part. We are just faithful servants, which is what I encourage all people to be. We actually consider ourselves to be in the “1 talent” category in the story of the talents found in Matthew 25. We in my family are all by nature shy and I am an engineer that has “the knack” (A Dilbert joke meaning technically minded with “utter social ineptitude”). So I can confidently and sincerely say that if we can do it, anyone can. All it takes is availability.

After hearing of the idea of a nursing home ministry, I prayed about it for several months. I knew it was God's will as James 1:27 says, “look after orphans and widows in their distress.” And also compelling me were the strong words of Jesus in Matthew 25 where he tells those on His left to depart from Him because, among other things, he was sick and they did not visit him. But to the others he said these blessed words “whatever you did for one of the least of

these brothers of mine, you did for me.” We often remind ourselves that we’re going to visit Jesus; it’s strong motivation.

So I talked to an assisted living center down the road about them needing a volunteer preacher on Sunday morning. They were very welcome to the idea as most of the residents grew up in church and many really missed being able to go now. They basically asked “when can you start”. It has been a blessing ever since.

In fact this book is really just a compilation of several sermons I’ve prepared over the years. This book represents years of research and study, but since I did it slowly over several years for weekly sermons it was not a daunting or difficult task.

It has also been good for us. I’ve been learning how to preach and this is helping me see all sorts of new things in the Word. I.e. I’ve learned a lot about prayer as I’ve been preaching on it. Notice in Paul’s letters that he often starts off his letter by how he’s been praying for them and ends the letter asking them to pray for him. This was the great Apostle Paul but he knew the power of prayer and asked for it often.

The Lord led me to preach on prayer a lot one year and it actually benefited us twice that year. Earlier in the year I was having some serious esophagus problems and one of the sweet ladies had a burden to pray for me. My esophagus got remarkably better. Also, after trying for almost a year to sell our house, one of the ladies felt a real burden one week to pray that we’d sell the house. We had an open house, had at least 6-8 families come by, and 3 offers. Now that’s remarkable because we hadn’t had a single offer in almost a year, not even a low-ball offer. I had an open house about a month before and only one person showed up. And I couldn’t trace it to any other difference. I thought it was kind of surreal to teach the church to pray, and then benefit from those prayers. But in all honesty, both of these saints were well-acquainted with prayer ministry.

It’s good for the whole family; we are all getting out of our shell to care for others. We tend to be very shy but this is helping us. We’ve met so many interesting people. Older people have interesting stories to tell and they are kind of funny. They seem to have a freedom about them that others don’t. And of course they’ve matured in many ways; they’re usually decent and not driven by pride, lust or greed. So it’s been a real joy to serve them and fellowship with them.

Nora was a 94-year-old lady who was mentally still very sharp. We enjoyed going up to visit her during the week and listen to her stories. She told stories of going through the great depression and how they used to live without the modern conveniences. And because of her I believe we must officially be the MOST “come as you are” church in Oklahoma City. She was completely modest, but came to church in a bathrobe. She even picked out a matching scarf to go with it. This is perfectly fine in our church and it actually didn’t look bad at all. Match that for come as you are!

Beverly was another interesting widow we got to know. Her husband was a fighter pilot and was killed in the 1967 war in Israel. She still had his military picture above her bed and never remarried. She was just a super sweet lady and could be really funny sometimes. At the end of a good sermon she would sometimes yell out “yeeee haaaww” which Sam thought was so funny. It made for a lively church service. We have her son’s phone number and we actually followed her to another assisted living center, hospital, and rehab center. Every time we saw her, she gave the most excited and appreciative greeting. One time while she was in the hospital with serious health problems we saw her transform from being very introverted and depressed looking to exploding with excitement when she saw us.

On one of our weekday visits we brought the neighbor girl, Caydence, to help her develop a love for serving others. At our recommendation, she had drawn a picture to have ready and she gave it to one of our residents, Cora. A week later Cora pulled the picture out of her purse and showed me she still had the picture. I took a photo of her with the picture and sent it to Caydence to show her how much it meant to Cora. Since then Caydence has always wanted to go with us whenever she can to visit Cora.

Paula has Down Syndrome and is one of the youngest residents, in her 50’s. She is super super sweet and caring and knew everything going on in the center. She helped us get residents on Sunday morning, letting us know who’s gone and such. Her sister visits her fairly often and on one of the visits they came out to visit our farm and thoroughly enjoyed it. Even though she doesn’t read she loves to collect books, we hardly ever see her without one.

One family came along that was especially encouraging to us. Some part of the family would always come to church with the resident, Emma. She was always just glowing with delight and her family always expressed strong thankfulness to us for what we were doing. She had to go to another facility and we were closing on a house and I didn’t have the time to find her new location, though I thought of them several times. But when Emma developed a serious health issue and died, the family came and found me and asked me to do the funeral. As a pastor to an assisted living center, you don’t have to be super polished or professional; they give you lots of grace (mercy). But I knew the seriousness of this situation and wanted to serve the family by doing a good job. So my family and I prayed real hard and I worked hard on the message. The Lord really helped me (and I mean that) give a good sermon to the family and moved my heart with compassion. I know it was the Lord because I went over it a couple times with my family and it was totally flat, and just before the service I was going through my notes and it was still confusing. But it all really came together when the service started. I just looked at the faithful husband of 67 years who was grieving and did it all for him. I even slowed down and talked normal, (I tend to talk too fast normally). So we showed them love and I was able to give the family a very comforting message as I was sure she was a Christian. I was also able to, with the family’s permission, mix in a very strong repentance type

message in a loving way to the rest of the family and friends, as I'm sure Emma would want. Many people thanked me afterwards for it.

What an opportunity to preach a strong, but loving, message to people that might not ever otherwise step foot in the church and at a time where they must be thinking about eternity. Also it is from a position where you have earned their respect by serving a member of the family. It is such an awesome opportunity. My friends who struggle in the street corner ministry downtown would be jealous for such an opportunity.

We've been there long enough for people to see our sincere love and are starting to take notice. We almost feel like part of the staff. One time two of the staff started asking for my notes to read later. One young girl was a Christian, who has to work on Sunday, and like all of us, needs exhortation to live for God. She worked in the memory care area and if a few of her residents came out to our service she took the excuse to come out and be with them in the service. The other is a young man from Africa with a heavy accent and may have been seeking the truth of God for the first time. So I was glad to share my notes with these two. I was very careful with my notes to make sure they were complete and easy to understand, which helped later when I incorporated them into this book. Circumstances moved them on and away from our center, which also happened with several others who started to take interest at other times. We were assured from friends who also minister like this that we planted seeds and God will continue to water them. Several family members have also joined our services. One time a son came in and his mother was already in the service so he joined the service, and from his expression he really needed to hear some truth. I tried my best while I had him. A few times staff members or family members have asked my wife for counseling on different matters. We call ourselves the church in the world but not of it.

Therefore, as you see, in addition to taking care of the widow and visiting the sick as Jesus commanded, we are also able to share our light in collateral ways with family and staff as we show our love with faithful service as God provides the strength. Also, as I said before, the good it has done us is wonderful. It has totally changed the way I see "church". Church is not something we go "to", to be blessed by, but after time it's supposed to be something you serve in, and not just in the 4 walls of the building. As Hebrews 5:12 says, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again." I don't think you can take a doctrine out of this that you have to be a teacher after a certain time, but it is an indication that it was somewhat expected.

Everybody needs to be active for the Lord!

When it comes to something as important as your eternal destiny you need to make sure you have the truth. Since Satan is the “father of lies” it’s not surprising that there has been much deception in the name of religion. Thankfully we have a source, known as the Bible, that has been carefully reconstructed from eyewitness accounts and people who gave their life for the message. It has stood the test of time and endless scrutiny with no significant flaws. Therefore it is a steady rock in the ever-changing sands of time. If you listen to what people tell you about this rock you are getting their bias and could possibly be trusting in something false. This book uses over 60 passages of the Bible to show a requirement of God that has been largely lost in modern Christianity. You may be surprised at just how far off from the source we have drifted. More importantly you need to make sure you have the truth.

- Learn who, what, when, and why Christianity has changed from the Biblical model.
- Discover how influential men used a few obscure scriptures and extensive extra biblical reasoning to fundamentally change core doctrines that had been taught and believed by all Christendom for many centuries.
- Discover the original biblical intention of the word “grace” and how it has changed.
- Learn about people's propensity to follow after other people, including very surprising propaganda examples, and see what you’ve fallen for (you have done so).
- Learn about how seeking God leads to faith in God, who changes the heart by the Holy Spirit so you enjoy doing good works.
- Discover the proper order of seeking, being justified, learning to trust in God's power, and then working with His energy.

About the author: Mike Murphy is a Mechanical Engineer working in the aerospace industry. He has been an avid seeker of truth in the Bible for over 20 years. He served as a volunteer pastor at an assisted living center where preparing weekly sermons provided the bulk of the research for this book.