

THE GOSPEL LESSON 9

REVIEWING “LORDSHIP SALVATION” PART 2

REVIEWING THE GOSPEL OF YOUR SALVATION

We continue our study of the Gospel of Your Salvation, anchored in the truth of Ephesians 1:13: *“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”* Over the past eight lessons, we have carefully examined this message as an announcement of good news centered entirely on a Person. We have seen that the gospel consists of who Jesus is (the eternal Word, YHWH in the flesh, the Promised Messiah), what He has done (His substitutionary death and resurrection, proving the payment was accepted), and what He promises (eternal life as a 100% free gift).

Crucially, the text demands a singular human response: *pisteuo*: to believe. To believe is not an act of the will, a prayer, or a decision, but it is the cognitive process of being convinced or persuaded by the testimony of Scripture that Jesus’ promise is true. The exact moment a person is persuaded by this message of truth, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit and immediately possess eternal life forever, completely apart from human effort, works, or subsequent behavior.

Today, we begin to examine a significant theological controversy within evangelical Christianity regarding the precise nature of “saving faith.” While there is widespread agreement that justification is by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, there is substantial disagreement about what constitutes genuine *pisteuo*. One prominent view, known as Lordship Salvation, argues that true saving faith inherently includes *metanoeo* (translated “repent”), defined by them as a turning from sin, alongside personal surrender, a commitment to Christ’s mastery, and a transformed life that perseveres.

Over the next three lessons we will examine the nine distinctives of this view as presented by John MacArthur and his church Grace Community Church. Our method remains the same: the Literal Grammatical Historical approach. We will observe exactly what the text says in its context, understand the author’s intent, correlate with the rest of Scripture, and apply the clear principle. We will see that while these distinctions are sincerely held and contain important truths about God’s truth and living the Christian life, they mis-synthesize Scripture by reading conditions into the gospel message that the text itself does not place there. They effectively add human responsibility and performance to what Christ has finished, undermining the freeness of grace and the certainty of assurance that Scripture gives to the one who believes.

This matters deeply. How we understand the gospel affects how we present it, how we counsel those struggling with assurance, and whether people rest in Christ’s finished work or in their own commitment and perseverance. Let us examine the first three distinctions with care, respect, and precision.

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DISTINCTION 1: FAITH JOINED WITH REPENTANCE

The Claim

The gospel calls sinners to faith joined in oneness with repentance. Repentance is a turning from sin—a change of heart that effects a change of behavior. It is not optional or a later step but is joined with faith in the gospel call itself. It is a God-given change of heart that produces visible behavioral change. Without this turning from sin, the faith is not genuine saving faith.

Key Scriptures Cited

Acts 2:38, 17:30, 20:21; 2 Peter 3:9; Acts 3:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:18-20.

Biblical Exposition

Let us examine these passages in their contexts to see what they actually teach.

Acts 2:38 – Peter addresses the Jewish crowd at Pentecost who had crucified their Messiah: “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The word “repent” (*metanoeo*) here is a call to change their mind about Jesus. They had rejected Him as the Christ; now they must change their mind and believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Baptism, in this context, is the public identification with the crucified and risen One for the forgiveness that was now available in context of the Kingdom. This is a specific historical call to Israel in light of their national rejection of the Messiah. It is not a universal prescription that moral lifestyle change must precede or coincide with faith for eternal life. Notice that John’s Gospel, written so that you may believe and have life (John 20:31), never conditions eternal life on repentance or baptism, only on believing in Jesus.

Acts 17:30 – Paul tells the pagan Athenians that God “is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” Here, “repent” is a change of mind about idols and false gods, believing in the one true God who raised Jesus. It is part of the gospel announcement that calls people to believe in the resurrected Christ. It is not a call to clean up one’s moral life. The context is evangelistic proclamation to Gentiles, and the response expected is to believe the message about Jesus.

Acts 20:21 – Paul summarizes his ministry to the Ephesian elders: “solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Repentance toward God and faith in Christ are presented as the content of the gospel message Paul preached. Repentance here is changing one’s mind about God and sin, believing in Him; faith is believing in the content of the message of Jesus Christ. But notice that in the flow of Paul’s actual ministry (see Acts 19–20), people responded by

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believing (Acts 19:18, 20:24-27). The phrase describes the gospel call, not a two-step process where moral reform must happen before or in conjunction with believing.

The Greek word for *repent* (metanoeō / metanoia) fundamentally means “to change one’s mind” or “to have an after-thought.” In evangelistic contexts this word has been used to distort and misrepresent the necessary response to the message of salvation.

The Problem with This Synthesis

Lordship Salvation reads these passages as requiring a radical, visible turning from sin (lifestyle change) as part of “saving faith” itself. But the texts do not say this. Many of these passages are addressed to Jewish audiences in light of their rejection of the Messiah, or are general calls reconsider the true God, Jesus, and the Gospel. None of them state that a person must reform their behavior or “turn from sin” before they can believe and receive eternal life. If this were essential to the gospel, the Gospel of John—explicitly written for the purpose of bringing people to eternal life through belief—would have included it. Instead, John repeatedly and consistently says: believe in Him, and you have eternal life (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 20:31).

This view confuses justification (the instant declaration of righteousness by faith alone) with the objective of the Christian life (the ongoing process of being conformed to Christ’s image). It makes moral reform part of the condition for receiving the gift, rather than the call for believers in light of the grace of God. Romans 4:5 is clear: “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.” The one who believes is still “behaviorally ungodly” at the moment of believing in Jesus; God justifies the ungodly, not the one who has already turned from sin in behavior.

Why This Matters

This distinction makes the gospel a call to moral improvement plus faith, rather than faith in the One who saves from sin. It keeps sincere seekers from coming to Christ until they feel they have “repented enough” or cleaned up their life. It robs believers who struggle with ongoing sin of assurance, causing them to wonder if their repentance was genuine. It adds a subjective human element to what Scripture presents as an objective gift received by faith alone. The sealing of the Spirit happens the moment one believes (Eph 1:13), not after one has demonstrated sufficient behavioral change.

DISTINCTION 2: SALVATION IS ALL GOD’S WORK; REAL FAITH ENDURES

The Claim

Salvation is all God’s work. Even faith is a gift from God, and real faith endures forever rather than being defective or short-lived. Genuine saving faith cannot ultimately fail. If someone falls away or does not persevere, it demonstrates that their faith was never real saving faith.

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Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:1-5, 8; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 11 (and context of perseverance).

Biblical Exposition

Ephesians 2:8-9 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” We fully affirm this. Salvation is entirely by God’s grace, received through faith, and is God’s gift. The demonstrative “that” (touto) refers to the entire salvation-by-grace-through-faith. Faith is a noun and refers to that which is believed. The content of what is believed to be saved. God initiates and persuades through His Word. However, the text does not say that the God gives the ability or function of belief.

Philippians 1:6 – “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” This is a wonderful promise of God’s faithfulness. He who began the work will complete it. It is God’s preserving grace at work in believers. But it is not a statement that every person who professes faith will visibly persevere in obedience, nor that failure to persevere proves one was never truly saved. It is an encouragement to the Philippian believers that God will continue His saving work in them resulting in the finished work, the glorification of the saints. The ground of their confidence is God’s character, not their own track record.

Hebrews 11 – This “hall of faith” celebrates men and women who believed God and acted on that belief, often at great cost. Yet even here, the chapter notes that some “did not receive what was promised” in this life (v. 39), and it includes people who had significant failures (e.g., David, Samson). It does not teach that faith is always marked by visible, unbroken perseverance. It shows that faith when accompanied by positive execution, this pleases God and is honorable.

The Problem with This Synthesis

Lordship Salvation takes the precious truth that God preserves His own (which we affirm—John 10:28-29; Romans 8:38-39; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9) and turns it into a test: if someone does not persevere in faith and obedience, they were never truly born again. This makes assurance dependent on one’s ongoing performance rather than on Christ’s promise and the Spirit’s seal. It confuses God’s preserving work (a promise to the believer) with a visible proof that one must maintain to validate their initial faith.

Scripture does teach that true believers are kept by God’s power (1 Peter 1:5), but it also contains warnings to believers against drifting (Hebrews 2:1), and examples of believers who sinned grievously (David in 2 Samuel 11–12; Peter’s denial in Luke 22; the Corinthian believer in 1 Corinthians 5; Demas in 2 Timothy 3). The distinction between a believer who falls into sin and an unbeliever is not always immediately visible to us; God alone knows what a person believes. Making visible perseverance the test of “saving

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faith” shifts the ground of assurance from “Christ promised and I believed” to “I am showing enough fruit to prove my faith was real.”

Why This Matters

This view can lead believers into constant self-examination and doubt: “Is my faith enduring? Am I persevering enough? If I struggle or fall, was my faith ever real?” This is the opposite of the certainty Scripture gives. In Ephesians 1:13, the sealing happens the moment one listens and believes, not after one has proven perseverance. The Holy Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance (Eph 1:14), guaranteeing what Christ promised.

Assurance rests on the object of faith (Christ and His finished work), not on the quality or duration of our performance. God preserves His own; we do not preserve ourselves by our perseverance.

DISTINCTION 3: THE OBJECT OF FAITH IS CHRIST HIMSELF; TRUE FAITH INVOLVES COMMITMENT

The Claim

The object of faith is Christ Himself, not merely a creed or a promise. True faith therefore involves personal commitment to Christ; all true believers follow Jesus. One cannot receive Christ as Savior while rejecting Him as Lord. Saving faith is not abstract intellectual assent but personal trust in and commitment to the person of Christ as Lord and Savior, resulting in following Him. In contrast, easy-believism teaches that saving faith is simply being convinced or giving credence to the truth of the gospel and does not include a personal commitment to the person of Christ.

Key Scriptures Cited

John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:15; John 10:27-28.

Biblical Exposition

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” The construction “believes in Him” (*pisteuōn eis auton*) is personal belief directed toward the person of Jesus. We agree believing in Jesus is not directed toward a creed or a promise but one must believe in Jesus. But in John’s Gospel, “believe in Him” is consistently defined by the context: being convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who gives eternal life as a free gift (John 20:31, 3:36, 5:24, 6:47). It does not include “personal commitment to follow as Lord” or “surrender” as a condition for receiving that life. Following and obedience are the expected response of the one who has already received life (John 14:15 – spoken to disciples who already believe).

John 10:27-28 – “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” Note the order carefully. The sheep (those who belong to Him) hear His voice, are known by Him, and follow Him—and He gives them eternal life. The giving of eternal life

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is not conditioned on their following; following is what His sheep do because they are His. The double security (“will never perish” and “no one will snatch”) rests on His and the Father’s grip, not on the sheep’s perfect or consistent following. The text does not say, “Those who follow Me I will give eternal life if they continue to follow.” It says He gives eternal life to His sheep, and they will never perish.

2 Corinthians 5:15 – “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.” This describes the purpose and result for those who live (i.e., believers). It is not the condition for receiving life. The “might no longer live for themselves” is the expected outworking of having received the life Christ purchased, not the prerequisite for receiving it.

The Problem with This Synthesis

Lordship Salvation makes “personal commitment” and “following Jesus” part of the definition of saving faith itself. If one is not following or has not surrendered, one does not truly believe. This again confuses the nature of faith (being persuaded by the testimony about who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He promises, and receiving the gift) with instructions that believers are to follow (love and obedience).

In John’s explicit purpose statement (20:31), the condition is singular and clear: believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The result is having life in His name. Discipleship, following, commitment, and surrender are subsequent to receiving life. Christ is indeed Lord, and His lordship is not optional for the believer’s walk. But making submission to His lordship a condition for receiving eternal life adds a work of human commitment to what Scripture presents as a free gift received by faith alone. It reverses the biblical order: believe in Him for eternal life, and as a commitment to Him as Lord He then calls His own to life that is honoring to God and the grace he has given.

Why This Matters

This distinction makes salvation depend in part on the degree and consistency of one’s commitment and following, rather than solely on Christ’s sufficiency and promise. It introduces a subjective element: “Have I committed enough? Have I surrendered fully? Am I following sufficiently to prove my faith is real?” This can cause those who have believed but struggle with God honoring behavior, or who have not yet understood the full implications of Christ’s lordship, to doubt whether they are truly saved. Scripture presents the gospel as objective good news: Christ has done it all; believe and receive the gift. The lordship of Christ is not denied; it is not part of the gift of God. He is Lord, and those who believe in Him for eternal life are then called to live under His lordship as an expression of gratitude and new life.

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CONCLUSION

In these first three distinctions we see a consistent pattern. Lordship Salvation takes important Biblical truths—about repentance as a change of mind, God’s preserving grace, the personal nature of belief in Jesus Christ, and the call to dedication of one’s life to him—and weaves them into the condition for receiving salvation itself. Repentance is redefined as moral lifestyle change required before or in faith; God’s gift is made to require visible endurance as proof of “saving faith;” believing in Jesus Christ is made to include commitment and following as part of the believing that saves.

The result is a gospel that, while containing much truth and sounding deeply Biblical, effectively requires the sinner to bring something of their own moral response, commitment, and perseverance as part of the transaction for eternal life. This stands in contrast to the clarity and simplicity we have seen throughout Scripture: the gospel announces who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He promises. The one who is persuaded that this is true receives eternal life as a free gift the moment they believe. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit and guaranteed an eternal inheritance—not because of the quality of their commitment or the consistency of their perseverance, but because of the finished work and unbreakable promise of Jesus Christ.

In the next lesson we will examine distinctions 4-6, which continue this theme by addressing the claim that “saving faith” inevitably produces a changed life with no unbroken pattern of sin, that the gift of eternal life includes all that pertains to life and godliness now, and that faith involves unconditional surrender to Christ as Lord. We will see again how these principles about the life of the believer are misapplied to the condition for salvation.

If you have believed in Jesus (if you are convinced that He is the eternal Son of God who died for your sins and rose again, and that His promise of eternal life is true for everyone who believes in Him) then you have eternal life now. You are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Nothing can separate you from His love. Rest in that certainty. The gospel is gloriously simple because Christ has done all the work. Believe, and you have it.