

THE GOSPEL LESSON 12

REVIEWING “LORDSHIP SALVATION” PART 5 - CAPSTONE

REVIEWING THE GOSPEL OF YOUR SALVATION

We have spent several lessons walking through the nine distinctives of Lordship Salvation one at a time, letting Scripture answer each claim on its own ground. That work stands. This lesson takes a different shape. Rather than moving point by point through Grace Community Church's list, we are going to gather the strongest, most Scripture-saturated responses and let them speak directly to the claim that Christ must be submitted to as Master before He can be a personal Savior.

This is meant to stand on its own as a direct answer. Where our earlier lessons dismantled MacArthur's synthesis piece by piece, this lesson builds a more general case. We also stress what the text says plainly and limit inference. The weight is meant to fall on the words of Scripture themselves.

WHAT LORDSHIP SALVATION CLAIMS

Strip away the sermons and the systems, and the claim reduces to four words used as levers: repent, faith, Lord, and disciple. They redefine these terms. Repent is defined as turning from sin. Faith is defined as commitment. Lord is defined as one who must be obeyed. Disciple is treated as a synonym for believer and the cost of being a disciple in a hostile environment is treated as the price of eternal life. Each of these five terms has a specific, discoverable meaning in the Greek text and in its context. Get the words right, and the entire system loses its footing.

I. GETTING THE WORDS RIGHT

Repent (metanoeo). The word simply means to change one's mind, to reconsider. It does not, in itself, have sin as its object. Like the English word “dozen,” which just means twelve until context tells you whether it's donuts or eggs, “repent” takes its object from the passage it sits in. In Hebrews 6:1 the object is dead works (self-righteous attempts to be righteous before God). In Acts 20:21 the object is God. In Acts 2:38, Peter is calling a crowd that had just rejected their Messiah to change their mind about who Jesus is. When John the Baptist tells his hearers to “bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8), the fruit is not repentance itself, it is the demonstration of an inward change of mind. Biblical repentance does not produce an outward expression; rather, John tells them to themselves produce fruit that demonstrates a changed mind. Nowhere does the word itself mean “turn from sin,” especially as a precondition for believing.

Faith (pistis). Keep two words straight here, because Lordship Salvation regularly blurs them. “pisteuo” is the verb, “to believe.” “pistis” is the noun, “that which is believed.” “Having faith” means that a person has heard the doctrines of God and is persuaded that they are true and thus now “has faith.” In its basic sense “pisteuo” or “pistis” does not carry any idea of commitment, surrender, or the giving over of one's whole life. The synonyms John's Gospel uses for belief are synonyms of receiving, not transaction: drinking water so that one never

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thirsts again (John 4:14), eating bread that gives life (John 6:35, 51), looking at the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness so as not to perish (John 3:14-15, echoing Numbers 21:8-9). There is no idea of committal in looking at a serpent on a pole. There is no thought of surrender in drinking water. Biblically, “faith,” is “that which persuades someone to the truth of God is true (Initially the Gospel of your salvation), not a decision to obey the imperatives of Jesus and God. The word “faith” or “believe” never absorbs surrendered obedience into its definition.

Lord (kyrios). In the Greek Old Testament, kyrios stood in for the name of Yahweh. In first-century usage, calling Jesus “Lord” was first and foremost a confession of His deity (that He is God in the flesh) not a private vow of obedience to His authority over one's daily choices. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31) identifies who it is you must believe in (the God-man who is able to save) not what you must promise to do for Him afterward.

Disciple (mathetes). Discipleship and believing for eternal life are two different categories in the New Testament, and the text keeps them separate. Salvation is a gift received the instant one believes (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:36). Discipleship (in the Gospels) is a costly, continuing walk that Christ Himself said required counting the cost first (Luke 14:25-33), something never once said in connection with receiving eternal life. If discipleship and salvation were the same thing, then continuing in Christ's word would be a condition of salvation, for Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 8:31). But continuance is nowhere made a condition for receiving the free gift (John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47). Discipleship describes the shape of a life already given; it is not the price tag on the gift.

In summary, clarity begins with these four biblical foundations: **faith is persuasion, repentance is a change of mind, Lordship is an understanding of deity, and discipleship is a distinct, following walk.** By anchoring these definitions, we protect the purity of the Gospel, ensuring the free gift of eternal life is never confused with the secondary call to service. With this framework in place, we can now see how the Gospel of John purposefully highlights this belief-only path to life.

II. THE ONE BOOK WRITTEN SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

If turning from sin, surrendering one's whole life, and committing to lifelong obedience were part of what it means to believe unto eternal life, there is exactly one book in the New Testament where we would expect to find this stated in the plainest possible terms, because there is exactly one book that tells us, in so many words, why it was written.

“But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

John wrote a Gospel with a stated evangelistic purpose, and in that Gospel the word “believe” (pisteuo) occurs roughly ninety-nine times as the sole, repeated condition for having

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eternal life (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26). The word “repent” (metanoeo) does not occur even once in the entire book. Neither does “surrender.” Neither does “commit your life.” If turning from sin was essential to salvation, the one Gospel written explicitly to bring readers to faith and life is the single worst place in all of Scripture for that requirement to be completely absent, not stated weakly, not implied, but absent.

Compare this with Luke's Gospel, which does contain demanding discipleship material. “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple... So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (Luke 14:27, 33). Jesus is speaking about the cost of being His disciple, a call to a committed, ongoing walk during the life of Christ. He never says, “and if you will not pay this cost, you cannot have eternal life.” Discipleship during Christ's time on earth is costly; believing for eternal life is free. These are not competing truths. They are two different subjects, addressed to two different questions and Lordship Salvation collapses them into one.

III. JUSTIFYING THE UNGODLY

Paul states the mechanism of justification in a single verse that Lordship Salvation cannot absorb without amendment:

“But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5).

The one who is justified is not described as someone who has turned from sin, surrendered his will, or begun a new life of obedience. He is described, at the very moment of justification, as ungodly. God does not justify the reformed; He justifies the ungodly who simply believe. Any system that requires observable, prior, or even simultaneous, moral transformation as a condition of justification has added a qualifier that Romans 4:5 explicitly excludes.

Paul makes the stakes of this addition unmistakable in Galatians:

“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel... if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed” (Galatians 1:6, 9).

And later: “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4). Paul is not describing legalists demanding circumcision as an isolated ceremonial issue; he is describing the general danger of adding any human condition, any work, any measure of moral performance, any level of commitment, onto grace as a requirement for receiving or keeping right standing with God. Grace, by definition, stops being grace the moment a human contribution is required alongside it (Romans 11:6).

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IV. CARNAL, SINNING, AND STILL CALLED BRETHREN

Perhaps the most direct biblical counter-evidence to the claim that “real faith inevitably produces a changed, obedient life” sits in a single letter Paul wrote to a church he refused to disown even while rebuking it severely.

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ... for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?” (1 Corinthians 3:1, 3).

Paul calls the Corinthians “brethren.” He does not question their standing in Christ. And in the same breath they are acting carnally (literally fleshly, *sarkikos*) babies in the faith, marked by jealousy and strife rather than the fruit of the Spirit. If an unbroken pattern of transformed behavior were the necessary mark of “genuine” faith, this letter could not have been written the way it was written.

The same letter goes further. A member of the church was living in open, ongoing sexual immorality “of a kind that does not exist even among the Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul's instruction is severe, hand him over to Satan “for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (5:5). Paul does not say this man was never saved. He assumes his salvation and addresses the discipline of his ongoing sin as a separate matter entirely.

Later in the same letter, Paul explains why some in the Corinthian church had grown sick and some had died, after abusing the Lord's Table in a way that showed contempt for other believers: “But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32). The very discipline (sickness, even physical death) that Lordship Salvation might point to as evidence these people were never truly believers, Paul explicitly names as the opposite: proof that they belong to the Lord, distinguishing them from “the world” which will be condemned. This is not condemnation.

V. JAMES 2:14-26, CORRECTLY UNDERSTOOD

No single passage is leaned on harder by Lordship Salvation than James 2:14-26. Read closely, on its own vocabulary and in its own present-tense argument, this passage is not testing whether anyone's faith is genuine. It is rebuking believers who already possess sound doctrine and will not act on it.

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ... For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:14, 26).

Who is being addressed. James calls his readers “my brethren” (2:1, 14) and has already described them as brought forth by the word of truth (1:18), already born again. There is no hint anywhere in this letter that James doubts the salvation of the people he is correcting.

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Faith (pistis) is the doctrine that is believed. James uses the noun pistis sixteen times in this letter, eleven of them in this one section, and never once uses the verb pisteuo except when quoting the demons' “belief” in verse 19. That is a telling ratio. Lexically, pistis carries the standard Greek lexicon (BDAG), “that which is believed: doctrine, teaching.” In James's own usage, faith takes adjectives no verb of believing ever takes—weak, strong, steadfast, hypocritical, dead (2:17, 26)—because it is being treated as a body of content that can be held well or held uselessly, not as a yes-or-no act of trust. The “faith” in question in verse 14 is specifically the doctrine James has just laid out: love your neighbor, care for the needy (1:27; 2:8). The question is not, does this man believe in Jesus? It is, does this man act on what he already believes about loving his neighbor?

“Says” (lego) is not a claim to be doubted. The verb is subjunctive, “if someone should say,” which in Greek marks the scenario as uncertain whether it will happen, not whether the statement, once made, is honest. Nowhere else in the New Testament does this construction mark a statement as a false or empty claim (compare John 2:5; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 3:4; 2 Corinthians 9:4). James is not describing a hypocrite pretending to believe. He is describing a real believer, holding real doctrine, who simply is not doing anything with it.

Works (ergon) means positive good deeds, never sin-avoidance. The noun's basic sense is “that which results from activity,” by definition it cannot mean the absence of an activity, such as not sinning. James never once rebukes his readers for committing sins in this section; he rebukes them for failing to do good. The “works” he has in mind are concrete: clothing and feeding a needy brother (2:15-16), and, drawn from the rest of the letter, counting trials as joy, bridling the tongue, caring for orphans and widows, showing no partiality, and gently correcting a brother who has wandered (1:2-4, 19, 27; 2:1; 5:19-20).

Save (sozo) is present tense. “Can that faith save him” is a present indicative, not a reference back to a past justification. It describes a current, ongoing need. Sozo's range across the New Testament includes physical rescue, healing, and preservation, not only deliverance from hell, and James's own letter tells us which sense governs this passage: he has just said that the implanted word “is able to save your souls” (1:21) in the context of sin's downward pull toward death (1:14-15), and he closes the letter the same way, turning a wandering brother back “will save his soul from death” (5:19-20). The consistent sense across the letter is preservation from the compounding, destructive consequences of unacted-upon sin, not a statement about how a person is declared righteous before God. A doctrine that is believed but never acted on does not keep a person from those consequences. That is the “advantage” (ophelos, v.14, 16) James says is missing: not eternal life, but present usefulness and protection from sin's wages.

Dead (nekros) means unfruitful, not nonexistent. Verse 17 concludes, “faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself”: isolated, unaccompanied, unproductive. The word never

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means “never existed.” A dead-end job is still a job; a dead battery is still a battery. Faith without works is real faith that has no beneficial output to others, not counterfeit faith.

Justified (dikaioo): by whom? “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac” (2:21) is the verse most often set against Romans 4. But dikaioo does not always mean “declared righteous by God.” It is used elsewhere of being declared right in the eyes of other people (Luke 7:29; 16:15; 1 Timothy 3:16), and Romans itself settles which sense applies to Abraham's works: “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God” (Romans 4:2). Abraham was declared righteous before God by faith alone, apart from works, back in Genesis 15:6, a point James himself quotes in the very next verse (2:23). What happened some twenty to thirty years later on Mount Moriah, when Abraham offered Isaac, was a justification before men: it vindicated, in the sight of every generation that would ever read Genesis 22, that Abraham truly believed God was able to raise the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19). James and Paul are not describing the same transaction. Paul asks how a sinner is declared righteous before God; James asks how a believer's profession is vindicated before others.

Perfectd (teleioo): completed, not proven genuine. “Faith was perfected” (2:22) uses the same word group as James 1:4 and 3:2, being made complete, whole, lacking nothing. It does not say faith was validated as real; it says faith reached its intended completion through the action that followed it. The same pattern closes with Rahab, who already believed God's word about Israel before she acted (Joshua 2:8-11) and whose reception of the spies did not create her faith but carried it through to its purpose, and, not incidentally, spared her physical life when Jericho fell (Joshua 6:22-25), the same present-tense “saving” James has been describing all along.

Put together, James 2:14-26 is not a test believers must pass to prove their faith was ever real. It is a rebuke to believers who already possess sound doctrine and will not act on it, warning them that a doctrine merely held, never acted upon, saves no one from the compounding wages of sin in this life, and vindicates no one's profession before a watching world. That is a serious warning. It is not the warning Lordship Salvation makes it out to be.

VI. THE ANCHOR: ASSURANCE RESTING ON GOD'S WORD, NOT OURS

Every argument above serves one purpose: to keep the ground of assurance where Scripture puts it: in the promise and the character of God, not in the consistency of the believer's obedience.

“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” (John 10:27-28).

The gift and the guarantee are given by Christ; the security is His grip, doubled by the Father's (10:29), not the sheep's flawless following.

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“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, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The seal is placed the instant one believes, and Paul later tells these same believers, whom he has just rebuked for grieving the Spirit through bitterness and slander (Ephesians 4:31), that they were nonetheless “sealed for the day of redemption” (4:30), a present, abiding seal on people capable of grieving the Spirit through real, ongoing sin.

“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” (Philippians 1:6). The confidence rests on who began the work, not on the visible evidence of its progress. “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son” (1 Corinthians 1:9). Faithful is the operative word, and it describes God, not the believer.

Lordship Salvation, by making present progressive spiritual growth and subsequent completion of the believer as the proof of past justification, collapses the gospel with injunctions and imperatives of the New Testament to believers into one and forces the doubting believer to search his own inconsistent obedience for evidence of a settled fact that God has already sealed by His own hand and His own word.

CONCLUSION

Every distinctive of Lordship Salvation, examined on its own biblical ground, turns out to rest on a redefinition of a word (repent, faith, Lord, disciple), a passage removed from its stated purpose (John 20:31, Luke 14:25-33), a passage read against its own present-tense verbs and its own vocabulary (James 2:14, 21-26), or a promise of God relocated from His faithfulness to ours (Philippians 1:6, Ephesians 4:30). None of this requires clever argument to overturn. It requires only reading the text closely, in its context, and letting it say what it says.

We return, as always, to Ephesians 1:13. Paul writes to people who had already heard the message of truth, already believed, and were already sealed. Nothing in that verse and nothing in the texts we have surveyed today asks them to first prove the durability of their commitment. If you have believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for your sins and rose again, and that His promise of eternal life is true, and true for you, then you have that life now, sealed by the Spirit of promise, kept by the grip of the Son and the Father together. Rest in that. The Gospel remains gloriously simple because Christ, and Christ alone, has done all the work.

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1. **If true saving faith necessarily includes a radical turning from sin that produces visible behavioral change, why does the one book written so that people “may believe... and that believing... may have life in His name” (John 20:31) never once use the word “repent” or require any moral reform?** John conditions eternal life solely and repeatedly on believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26). If lifestyle repentance is essential to the gospel itself, its complete absence from the explicit evangelistic purpose statement is inexplicable.
2. **When Paul says God “justifies the ungodly” who simply “believe in Him who justifies the ungodly” (Romans 4:5), how can a person be required to turn from sin or surrender the will before or in the act of believing?** The text describes the justified person, at the very moment of justification, as still behaviorally ungodly. Any demand for prior or simultaneous moral transformation adds a qualifier Romans 4:5 explicitly excludes.
3. **If genuine saving faith always produces a transformed life in which an unbroken pattern of sin cannot continue, how do you account for the Corinthian believers whom Paul still addresses as “saints,” “brethren,” and those who “have been sanctified in Christ Jesus” and will be “confirmed blameless” (1 Corinthians 1:2, 8-9)?** They were carnal, jealous, immoral, and some even died under divine discipline for abusing the Lord’s Table, yet Paul never questions their justification and explicitly distinguishes that discipline from condemnation with the world (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 5:1-5; 11:30-32).
4. **Does “repent” (metanoō) in the evangelistic contexts of Acts mean a change of mind about who Jesus is (or about idols/false gods), or does it mean a radical, 180-degree turning from sinful behavior as a condition for receiving eternal life?** In Acts 2:38 it is directed at Jews who had rejected their Messiah. In Acts 17:30 it is directed at pagans regarding the true God. The word itself means “to change one’s mind.” The behavioral “fruit” John the Baptist demanded is the demonstration of that changed mind, not the definition of repentance itself.
5. **If the object of saving faith is Christ Himself and therefore necessarily includes personal commitment and following as Lord, why does Jesus give eternal life to His sheep and then say they follow Him (John 10:27-28), rather than conditioning the gift on their following?** The order in the text is decisive: He gives eternal life to those who are His; following is what His sheep do because they are His. The double security rests on His grip and the Father’s, not on the consistency of the sheep’s obedience.
6. **When 1 John 2:3-4 and 3:23 define “His commandments” as believing in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and loving one another, how can these verses be turned into a general moral-code test of whether someone’s initial faith was genuine?** John

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writes to those who already believe so they may know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13), in the context of antichrists denying that Jesus is the Christ. The “test” is doctrinal fidelity to the apostolic message and love for the brethren, not a behavioral audit of overall obedience.

7. **If faith inevitably produces love for Christ that longs to obey, how do you explain genuine believers whom Scripture itself records as failing in love and obedience—Peter returning to fishing after the resurrection (John 21:3), Demas loving this present world and deserting Paul (2 Timothy 4:10), and the entire church at Ephesus leaving its first love (Revelation 2:4-5)?** These are not theoretical. Scripture presents them as real believers whose devotion faltered. Love and obedience are commanded responsibilities of those who already possess life, not automatic products of the act of believing.
8. **In James 2:14-26, when James addresses “my brethren,” uses the noun *pistis* (doctrine that is believed) rather than the verb of believing, speaks of works as positive good deeds toward the needy, and uses “save” in the present tense of preservation from sin’s destructive consequences in this life, how does this passage become a test of whether someone’s faith was ever saving in the first place?** James is rebuking already-born-again believers who hold sound doctrine but will not act on it. Abraham’s justification by works (offering Isaac) is vindication before men decades after he was justified by faith before God (Genesis 15:6). The passage never questions the reality of their initial faith.
9. **If “confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord” in Romans 10:9-10 is a required act of surrender for eternal life, why does the larger context of Romans 9–11 concern the eschatological remnant of Israel and physical deliverance into the Kingdom, and why does verse 14 make calling possible only after belief?** “Salvation” here is deliverance/preservation (as in Joel 2:32), not justification. Confession is open acknowledgment of the risen Messiah’s deity, not a vow of unconditional surrender. Heart belief produces righteousness; mouth confession/call produces deliverance. The order protects free grace; it does not add surrender as a condition of it.
10. **If the seal of the Holy Spirit is given the moment a person listens to the message of truth and believes (Ephesians 1:13-14), and if that same Spirit later seals believers who are still capable of grieving Him through bitterness and sin (Ephesians 4:30-31), on what textual basis can present love, obedience, or perseverance become the ground (or even a necessary confirming evidence) of whether one possesses eternal life?** Assurance rests on the object of faith (Christ’s person, work, and promise) and on the Spirit’s seal placed at the moment of believing. It does not rest on the fluctuating quality of the believer’s subsequent performance. To relocate it there is to make certainty depend on what Scripture never makes the foundation.