

THE GOSPEL LESSON 11

REVIEWING “LORDSHIP SALVATION” PART 4

REVIEWING THE GOSPEL OF YOUR SALVATION

We come to the last lesson in our examination of Lordship Salvation. One word about method first, because it governs everything that follows. We do not come to these texts holding a system that requires a particular verdict. We come holding a method: the consistent, literal (normal) reading of the words, in their grammar, and in their historical and cultural setting, and we let each passage say what it says. It is that method, applied across this whole series, that has produced the conclusion we keep arriving at: eternal life is a free gift, on the basis of grace, received the moment a person is persuaded that Jesus is the Christ who died for his sins and rose again. We did not import that conclusion; the texts yielded it. The Lordship distinctives, by contrast, are a synthesis: a conclusion assembled out of many verses and then read back into each one.

Distinctions 1–6 argued about what belongs inside saving faith: repentance, commitment, surrender. Those were arguments about the front door. Distinctions 7–9 move behind it. Love, obedience, and perseverance are offered now not as things a person must bring in order to believe, but as the evidence by which the reality of an earlier belief is afterward verified. Love (7), obedience (8), perseverance (9) — three faces of one doctrine: assurance by inference. And all three rest on a single premise, which we should set out in the open where we can watch it:

Genuine saving faith automatically produces love, obedience, and perseverance — to a degree that can be read off a person’s life.

Here is the heart of our response, and it is stronger than saying the evidence is merely unreliable. We deny the premise itself. Faith does not produce love. Faith does not produce obedience. Faith does not produce perseverance. Nothing behavioral is manufactured by the act of being persuaded that the gospel is true. Some of our like-minded friends have taken the “normal but not necessary” position in as though good behavior usually follows and only now and then fails to appear. We hold that belief in Jesus Christ and behavior are two different things, and Scripture never once says the first generates the second. Love, obedience, and endurance are commanded of believers and pursued by the believer’s own volition in response to grace and truth.

Scripture shows exactly that. Peter, already an Apostle, went back to his nets instead of the commission his Lord had given him (John 21:3). Demas, whom Paul names among his fellow workers (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24), “loved this present world” and deserted him (2 Timothy 4:10). A whole church at Ephesus “left its first love” and was told to “do the first works” again (Revelation 2:4-5). The Corinthians were carnal, jealous, immoral, and drunk at the table, and Paul still addressed them as sanctified saints (1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:1-3). If faith produced these behaviors, none of these people could exist, yet there they are in the text, believers who were not loving, not obeying, not persevering. Some even died in their sinful behavior. The premise, therefore, is not merely untestable. It is false.

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That single observation reshapes the whole task. We will not concede “these are the fruits of faith, only not the test.” We will show that they are not the fruits of faith at all, they are the responsibilities of the believer, and that every passage Lordship cites is one of three things: an instruction telling believers to do what does not happen on its own, an observation of what some believers were in fact doing, or a statement about a group other than struggling believers entirely. Not one of them says faith yields behavior. And the stakes are not academic. If assurance is grounded in behavioral evidence that faith is supposed to produce, and faith produces no such evidence, then this system has built the believer’s certainty on a foundation that was never laid.

DISTINCTION 7: TRUE BELIEVERS WILL LOVE CHRIST AND LONG TO OBEY

The Claim

Those who truly believe will love Christ and therefore long to obey Him. Genuine faith produces a love for Christ that shows itself in the desire to obey. Those who will not receive Christ as Lord are willfully rejecting Him.

Their Strongest Case

This is the most emotionally weighted of the nine, and it deserves the strongest form. John 14:15 comes from Jesus’ own lips — “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” — and 1 Corinthians 16:22 pronounces a curse: “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed.” Set together, they seem to make love for Christ both mandatory and self-evidencing: real believers love and obey, and the loveless stand under anathema. We will grant the texts their full weight and then read them for what they actually assert.

Key Scriptures Cited

1 Peter 1:8-9; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 16:22; John 14:15, 23.

Biblical Exposition

Love for Christ is not automatic in those who believe. Scripture is candid about genuine believers who, for a time, did not love and obey their Lord. Peter — already an apostle, already indwelt — abandoned his commission to go fishing (John 21:3). Demas, whom Paul lists among his fellow workers (Col 4:14; Philemon 24), later “loved this present world” and left him (2 Tim 4:10). An entire church is charged by the risen Christ with having “left its first love,” and told to “do the first works” again (Rev 2:4–5) — the loss is of works, of active devotion, in people He still calls His church. So, the claim “true believers will love Christ and long to obey” is not a description of what always happens; it is contradicted by the very people Scripture holds up as believers. That settles the matter before we reach a lexicon: whatever the cited verses mean, they cannot mean that faith guarantees love, because Scripture shows us believers who did not love.

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John 14:15 — “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.” Every word is spoken to the eleven at the supper, men who already believe. And notice the form of the sentence: a conditional. “If you love Me” — the “if” is a possibility, not an assertion. He is teaching them what love is, it keeps His word. This is instruction in how love behaves, addressed to believers who are entirely capable of loving Him and equally capable of failing to, as the coming hours prove.

1 Corinthians 16:22 — “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed (ἀνάθεμα, anathema). Maranatha.” Read this carefully, because it is regularly overread. To be anathema is to be set apart and handed over — given up to God for God Himself to deal with, rather than for the assembly to adjudicate internally. That is the force of the word paired with Maranatha, “Our Lord, come”: Paul commits the one who does not love the Lord to the Lord’s own reckoning at His coming. Now observe what the verse does not say. It does not say the person who fails to love the Lord is an unbeliever. It makes no pronouncement about whether such a one possesses eternal life. It says that lovelessness toward the Lord is a grave thing, and that God will address it. Whether the loveless person is saved or unsaved is not the question; God’s dealing with lovelessness is. Which means the verse cannot function as a test of salvation, it never speaks to salvation at all. Lordship takes a text about God’s response to a loveless heart and turns it into a criterion for identifying the regenerate, a use the words do not support.

1 Peter 1:8 — “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible.” Note carefully what Peter is doing. He is not stating an absolute (“all who believe love”), and he is not asserting that faith manufactured their love. He is making an observation about this particular audience: he knows these scattered, suffering believers, and he can say of them, truthfully, that they love the Lord they have never seen. It is a behavioral observation offered as encouragement to people under pressure; this is your devotion; take heart. It describes what these believers are in fact doing. It is not a positional guarantee that attaches to faith, and it is certainly not a condition believer must be ascertain. Universalize an observation into a test, and you get a person who is introspective about their salvation, rather than objective.

Across all three: John 14 instructs believers in how love behaves; 1 Corinthians 16 hands the loveless over to God without ruling on their salvation; 1 Peter 1 observes the actual devotion of a specific audience. Not one of them says faith produces love, and not one of them makes love the test of who has eternal life. It is incumbent upon the believer to love the Lord, an attitude and a behavior we must all pursue perpetually.

Biblical love for Christ is not an inner feeling to be measured; it is devotion expressed in action — keeping His word (John 14), honoring and obedience to His instructions, taking on

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the values of Jesus. And precisely because it is a matter of the believer's ongoing volition, it can be strong in one season and absent in another, and can even be forsaken, as Peter's nets and Demas's departure show. To make the presence of that devotion the test of whether a person has eternal life is to make eternal certainty rise and fall with the believer's own faithfulness, the very thing Scripture shows faltering in men whose salvation was never questioned.

The Problem with This Synthesis

The synthesis takes love — which Scripture presents as the believer's variable, commanded, sometimes-neglected devotion — and reassigns it as an automatic product of faith that can be read as proof of regeneration. Both halves fail. Faith does not produce love automatically (Peter, Demas, Ephesus), and the cited texts never make love a test of salvation (they instruct, they commit the matter to God, they observe). What is left is a criterion Scripture neither supplies nor supports, laid as a burden on people it was never meant to bind.

Why This Matters

Picture a woman who believed the gospel at nineteen and walked with Christ for thirty years. Then tragedy strikes and she is unprepared for the devastation, and for two years she feels toward God nothing but numbness and, some mornings, anger. Under Lordship Theology, her lack of love is evidence she may never have been saved at all — grief has unmasked a false professor.

But her eternal life was never fastened to her love in the first place. It was fastened to Christ's promise and sealed by the Spirit the day she believed (Eph 1:13), and neither her grief nor her silence toward God can unfasten it. The gospel tells her that her standing is secure even if she is unloving; Lordship tells her that her cold heart may prove she never had one. Only the first is good news, and only the first is true.

DISTINCTION 8: BEHAVIOR IS AN IMPORTANT TEST OF FAITH

The Claim

Behavior is an important test of faith. Obedience is the evidence that one's faith is real. Salvation is by faith alone, yet obedience serves as necessary evidence — a test — of the reality of that faith.

Their Strongest Case

1 John 2:4 is blunt: “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” No verse in the New Testament links the knowledge of God to obedience more directly, and it is fair to call this the strongest single text Lordship can cite. A treatment that dodges it forfeits the argument, so we go straight at it.

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1 John 2:3 (“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments”); 1 John 2:4.

Biblical Exposition

We must read 1 John with John’s intent. He writes to people who already believe, so that they may know what they already have: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (5:13). And he writes into a specific crisis, antichrists among them teaching that Jesus is not the Messiah (2:18, 22, 26; 4:2–3). John is leading his readers back to the Apostolic message and helping them tell the true message from the false.

John defines his own terms, and the whole distinction hangs on one word he does not leave undefined: “commandments.” The Lordship reading fills that word with a moral code — the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, a standard of conduct — and then reads obedience to the code as the test of genuine faith. But John tells us a chapter later exactly what “His commandments” are: “This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another” (3:23). Believe, and love. That is what “keeping His commandments” means in this letter — continuance in the apostolic confession that Jesus is the Christ, and love for the brethren. It is not a behavioral audit. Fill the word as John fills it, and the “test of behavior” the distinction needs is simply not in the text.

1 John 2:3 — With this information, we look at the idea of “knowing Him” as spiritual maturity that has been implemented and used in the life of these believers. The conclusion is that those who have come to know Him are ones who are spiritually mature, knowing Jesus through the teaching of the Apostles. Not only is this based on a factual understanding, but it is also believed and realized in the life of the believer.

What does he mean here by keeping His commandments? What we need to do is keep reading the rest of the letter. 1 John 3:23-24. The commandments of Jesus Christ are to believe in Him and to love. A large portion of this letter will be dedicated to what love is, so we will wait for that. What we have already seen is an emphasis on the purity of the Apostolic message, that Jesus is the Messiah. In John, to Know God is to know Jesus Christ. The first commandment is to believe in Jesus. If one does not maintain a belief that Jesus is the Messiah, He does not know Him, does not know God. If he did know God, then he would not deny Jesus is the Messiah.

1 John 2:4 — The first concept in knowing God is to maintain knowing Jesus. This is part 1 of keeping His commandments. This is not an internal evaluation of an individual's performance; rather, it is an outward expression of having known God.

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The one who affirms to have come to know Him but does not have a life that reflects this affirmation is living a lie. The writer repeats the same thing from 1 John 1:6. Something is out of sorts, and the statements made by this believer and what is observed are inaccurate.

Those who state that Jesus is not the Messiah have demonstrated that they have not come to know Him (perfect tense). They have been moved from the basic truth of Jesus Christ; they have not abided in Him. Later in the letter, the author makes this clear (1 John 2:24).

The rest of verses 5-6 now provide the ought. This is about how believers are able to identify with each other, and it is a simple statement. If one says, affirms, that they abide in Him; to walk just as He walked, what is the primary characteristic of Jesus? Love. What is agape? The unconditional, self-sacrificial, desire and activity for the benefit of another.

The humanity of Jesus is on display.

1. Serve One Another
2. Sacrifice for One Another
3. Desire what is Best for One Another
4. Provide for One Another

This is not a test but a challenge.

The Problem with This Synthesis

The synthesis makes three moves the text refuses. It fills “His commandments” with a moral code, when John defines them as believing in Jesus and loving the brethren (3:23). It reads a cause — faith produces obedience — into a verse that states only correlation and places a test where there is challenge to the believers. What 1 John gives as assurance and challenge to believers, Lordship reissues as a behavioral test of whether one is saved.

Why This Matters

A young man believes in Jesus, is disciplined and sincere. In his twenties he falls into pattern of sin he hates and keeps returning to. Under this distinction his behavior is the test, his result is failing, and the conclusion is that he was never saved. Tell him that his sin proves he is unsaved, and you sever him from the one remedy Scripture gives, and this leads him away from Christ rather than to Him. Assurance grounded in Jesus our Advocate sends the saint back to the cross, back to grace. Assurance grounded in the audit sends him into the dark.

DISTINCTION 9: GENUINE BELIEVERS PERSEVERE; APOSTASY PROVES NEVER SAVED

The Claim

Genuine believers persevere in the faith. Those who completely turn away from the Lord show that they were never truly born again. True saving faith perseveres; final apostasy demonstrates that the person was never genuinely regenerate.

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The Strongest Case for It

Two texts anchor the point. 1 John 2:19 — “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us” — appears to say outright that those who left were never truly among the saved. And 1 Corinthians 1:8 promises that Christ “will confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,” read as a guarantee that genuine believers will in fact persevere to a blameless end. Together they look airtight: the real persevere, and those who fall away expose themselves as never having been real.

Key Scriptures Cited

1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 John 2:19.

Biblical Exposition

1 John 2:19 — Read the verse where John places it, not in the abstract. The ones who “went out” are the specific people named just before: the “antichrists” of 2:18 — all six verbs in verse 19 are third-person plural and point back to them. And here is the point most easily missed: the verse is not answering the question Lordship brings to it. The position of these people before God is not what the text is deciding. John’s concern throughout the letter is the message (light against darkness, the apostolic truth against the antichrist’s lie) and here he tells his readers that these deceivers, though they had been among the community and posed as apostolic followers, were never truly of it. “They were not of us” means they never belonged to the apostolic fellowship in its doctrine; they never abided in it, and their going out and teaching a false Christ is what revealed (φανερώω) it. That the antichrist message can be carried by a settled deceiver or by someone himself deceived is exactly why John keeps the focus on the message and not on a verdict over persons. The function of the verse is to steady the readers: the deceivers had never been of the true community to begin with.

Notice, then, what John does not do, because this is where Lordship overreaches. He does not lay down a rule that anyone who departs, or doubts, or falls into sin, or grows cold, was therefore never saved. He is not writing a test for a wavering believer to run on himself or on a struggling friend, and he is not adjudicating the eternal state of everyone who ever leaves. He is identifying a specific group of antichrist deceivers by their abandonment of apostolic doctrine. To lift “they were not of us” out of that setting and make it a universal principle, that every departure proves a false profession, is to take a statement about the message and its carriers and turn it into a verdict over every believer who ever struggles. Within the letter, love is the one behavioral consideration, and doctrine is the primary test. That test is for weighing what a teacher carries, not a mirror handed to a believer to weigh his own salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:8 — “Who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Everything turns on what “confirm... blameless” means, and on who does it. The verb “confirm” (βεβαιόω, bebaioō) means to establish beyond doubt, to put on

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unshakable footing — the same word Paul used four verses earlier of the gospel being established among them (1:6). “Blameless” is ἀνέγκλητος (anenklētos), the alpha-negative joined to ἐγκαλέω, “to bring a charge, to accuse”: it means un-accusable, incapable of being arraigned. And the actor is Christ: “He will confirm you.” The believer contributes nothing to the verb; it is done to him.

The blamelessness is located “in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,” a future, forensic setting, the court of heaven. Paul is not promising that Christ will develop these Corinthians into people of flawless conduct by the end of their lives. The promise is not behavioral but positional: from this day until the day of Christ, no charge will stand against the believer, because his standing is not his own. Romans 8:31–34, which uses the very verb egkaleō: “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies.”

The Problem with This Synthesis

It fuses “God keeps the person” with “the person’s continuance proves he was kept,” then makes the second the test of the first. That misreads God’s unconditional promises as conditional inspections, and it makes present assurance logically impossible, since the only conclusive evidence (a whole life persevered) arrives only after the life is over.

Why This Matters

A man believed the gospel sixty years ago and walked faithfully for decades. Then a business collapse and a divorce broke him, and he spent fifteen bitter years far from any church. Did he persevere? Through those fifteen years, by any honest reckoning, no. Under this distinction, those years are evidence he was never born again. But the man was sealed by God, and the God who called him into partnership with His Son and Jesus presents the believer before God based upon His own righteousness, not the behavior of the believer. The question is not, “Did you persevere well enough to have been saved?” The only question the gospel ever puts to anyone: “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who died for your sins and rose again, and He promised you eternal life — do you believe this?”

CONCLUSION

We have now examined all nine distinctives, and one sentence gathers them. Distinctions 1–6 loaded conditions into the front door of faith; distinctions 7–9 stationed inspectors behind it. Front and back, the effect is the same — to make the sinner’s response, and then the sinner’s record, part of a transaction Christ finished alone.

Let us state plainly, then, where assurance actually rests. It rests on the object of our belief and nowhere else: on who Jesus is, on what He accomplished, on what He promised. We know we are saved because of the seal the Spirit which is placed on the believer the instant he believes in Jesus. It does not rest (even partly, even as a secondary confirmation) on the believer’s love, obedience, or perseverance. It cannot.