

Alaska Christian Ministry to Seafarers

Can You Articulate Your Theology of Salvation?



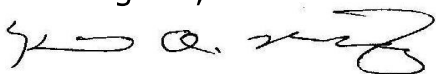
And, Is It Biblical?

Can You Articulate Your Theology of Salvation? And, Is It Biblical?

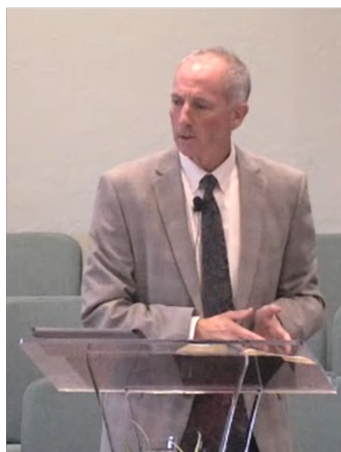
Lately, I have been speaking with those who are struggling with their understanding of God's plan of salvation. They are struggling because they are dealing with their logic, what they think is just, and a lifetime of teaching from many contradictory sources.

I am sure you are thinking what I always think: "Why not just believe what the Word of God has to say?" That is the answer, isn't it? So, although I can't always change people's minds, one thing I can do is to try and teach the truth of God's Word in the clearest way possible. That's what this little booklet is all about with respect to God's so-great salvation!

In His grace,



Kevin Redig



All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Introduction

We are going to be spending some time on the topic of theology. The word theology is a compound that can be traced back to two Greek words: the word *theos* means god; and the word *logia* means the expression of words or thought. In the same way that biology is the study of our current understanding of the nature of life, theology is often defined as the study of the nature of God and religious belief.

What I am really interested in is theology as it relates to the specifics of one's salvation. Now perhaps you have the idea that there is only one theology on any particular topic. But the truth is, there are all kinds of theologians and all kinds of theologies. The atheist holds to a theology that there is no God—and is typically quite committed to it. Next, there are liberal theologians who reject the Bible as an authoritative source, and they build their theologies from all manner of man-made sources. Then there are those who want us to agree that all theologies are basically good and we should just accept them all.

The foolishness of this last position is pointed out with a bit of humor by Steve Turner in a lengthy poem of which this is just an excerpt:

*We believe that theologies are basically the same. . .
they only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven,
hell, God, and salvation.*

With many competing theologies vying for our attention, and an understanding that all Christians are accountable for what they believe, that brings us to the questions we must ultimately consider:

**Can you articulate your theology of salvation?
And, is it Biblical?**

I trust you will agree, if it is true that your theology—

what you believe about God and His works—is going to determine whether you spend eternity in heaven or in hell, then you dare not get it wrong! Further, it only stands to reason that you should be able to articulate this most important message to others, for example family and friends.

Theology Considerations

With this being the case, let me suggest two things for you to consider as a Christian when evaluating your theology:

1. Theology has only one

source. That source would be God Himself and anything He might choose to reveal to us. Since God created mankind for fellowship with Himself, He has chosen to reveal quite a bit to us, much of which He has preserved for our ongoing use. Consequently, there is only one authoritative and reliable source for that which He has revealed and that is the Bible—the Word of God. He exhaled it, and the Spirit of God moved human authors to record His message without superintending their vocabularies, styles, or experiences.



All Scripture is God-breathed. . . . II Timothy 3:16

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. II Peter 1:21

2. Theology has one primary objective.

The objective is to understand what God has chosen to reveal. For as we do, we are able to share His thoughts, affections, and purposes. Every careful teacher of God's Word habitually questions over and over again,

“Am I correctly understanding what God has preserved in His Word?” And, only when that teacher is sure, should he or she teach it to others.

Theology Importance

By this point, I trust you have sensed that I think our theology is a crucial topic for all those who are a part of this local body of believers. Let me give you several reasons why I believe this is so important. First, our understanding and zeal for a pure Gospel message—one from the pages of Scripture and centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ—is an essential part of what unites us as a church fellowship.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 3:11

There can be no unity among a body of believers apart from a shared theology regarding the person and work of our Savior! As a local church, we come from many backgrounds, many traditions of faith, and many schools of theology. We welcome all to come and sit under the teaching of this local church. But, we do not espouse a *big tent* approach to the truth! By that I mean that not all of our varied theologies will pass through the grid of God’s Word without being found wanting.

Second, it is common for people who join us to have differences of opinion on some aspect of what I teach. The ideal way to address these differences is very straightforward, we sit down and open the Word of God to see what it has to say. For, as stated above, our one goal is to understand God and His thoughts, affections, and purposes. We do this by understanding what He has chosen to reveal to in His Word. If we come to agreement from the Word over our differences, problem solved.

If we disagree on what the Word teaches, it is a simple matter to give the Holy Spirit time to reveal the truth. If a believer chooses to hold to some teaching that is not in harmony with the Word of God, that error will necessarily limit our fellowship. But to the extent there is division, I am always hopeful that, in time, the ongoing teaching of God's Word will be used by the Holy Spirit to convict our hearts and transform our thinking.

Finally, Jesus establishes a very important principle in John 8:31-32 that most certainly applies to us:

"If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Clearly, to be a disciple, or follower of Jesus, you must hold to His teaching. Further, this truth will set you free. Now what is unsaid, but implicit in this statement, is that error will bind.

By way of application, two competing theologies on salvation are not both right. There is that which is truth, and then all else must be error—and error will enslave to itself those who believe it. Paul tells Timothy that the Church is to be the "*pillar and foundation of the truth*" (I Timothy 3:15), and that simply cannot be true without careful and constant attention to what we believe from God's Word.

Theology Expression

Throughout this book I am raising two questions for you to answer:

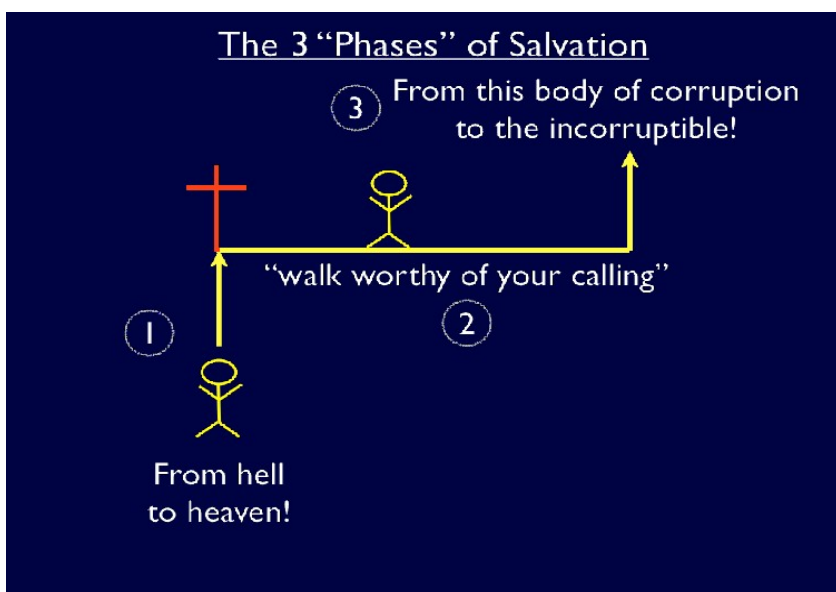
- *Can you articulate your theology of salvation?*
- *And, is it Biblical?*

For all the reasons stated, above you need to be able to answer these questions positively, so I am going to keep asking.

But in the meantime, as your pastor, let's force me to answer these questions! Not surprisingly, I most certainly can articulate my theology of salvation and I would be delighted to defend its Biblical foundation to you. All I ask is that you bear with me as I work all the way through it. If I raise questions in your mind at some point, hang in there and make sure to see it all the way through. For, when I am done, I am confident you will see that my theology of salvation is both Biblical and systematically coherent.

Systematically coherent is a new phrase. What I mean to imply is that you will see the unity of the Scriptures rather than the contradictory pieces that often arise with errors in theology. In other words, what I am going to present to you is not just a collection of Scripture taken out of context, but instead is the Biblically consistent message from God to us.

Let's start with our familiar diagram of *The 3 "Phases" of Salvation*. This diagram helps remind us that God's plan of salvation has multiple aspects to it, as well as some



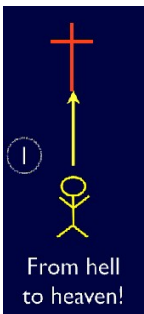
aspects that occur at a point in time while others occur over the course of time.

- Phase 1 is salvation from an eternal destiny in the Lake of Fire to one in God's Heaven.
- Phase 2 is the number of days God gives us on this earth as one of His children. As His children, we have a destiny in heaven, but we also have a certain number of days to represent Christ to a lost and needy world.
- Phase 3 of our salvation is deliverance from this slowly failing body, with its nature to sin, to an eternal state with a glorified body just like that of the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Now, in terms of our questions on theology, we are going to take a closer look at just the first two phases of our salvation: From hell to heaven and the Christian Life.

From Hell to Heaven

In terms of developing a theology of salvation, how is a person saved from an eternity in the Lake of Fire? Let's first consider that which is based upon Scripture (good theology), and then explore some of the common theologies that ignore or distort scripture (bad theology).



Good Theology

In order to understand how we are saved from hell to heaven, let's turn to Scripture:

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. . ." Acts 16:30-31

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

Ephesians 2:8-9

The question asked in Acts 16 came from a man who felt his own desperate need. Isn't the answer to his question as clear as it could be? All he needed to do was to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

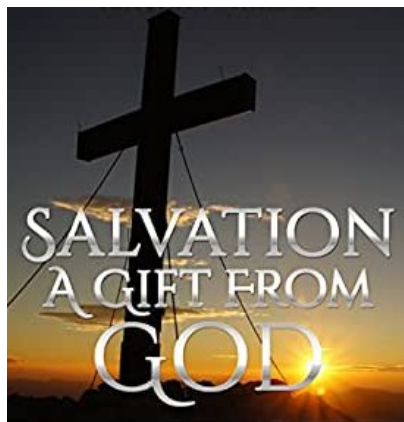
By the use of those three names—Lord Jesus Christ—Paul and Silas make clear the object of our faith is to be:

- Lord—the eternally existent Second Person of the Trinity—deity.
- Jesus—Who came to this earth and took on our humanity.
- Christ—Who then satisfied the justice of God by dying in our place, for our sins, as the Christ (Messiah).

The passage from Ephesians strengthens our understanding and provides further details. We are saved by the grace of God and not by anything that we *bring to the table*. No works on our part are involved in saving us.

The reference to grace means that God does all of the work of providing for our salvation from hell to heaven and it is apart from our merit or worth. Like the passage in Acts, the passage in Ephesians tells us that the one response that God is looking for from us is faith—trusting in Jesus Christ for who He is and what He has done. Of course, the absence of any kind of work requirement on our part means that there is nothing for any saved human being to boast about. All the glory belongs to God.

Let me suggest that the above is *good* theology.



Bad Theology

What does bad theology look like? To start, there are many theologies that add some kind of works to the need for faith. These works can consist of either starting to do good things or stopping doing bad things as the means by which God is then obligated to save.

Perhaps you are thinking, "Although I didn't see works in the Scripture, what harm could there be in good works?" Again, let's let the Scripture speak for itself:

. . .the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.

Romans 9:30-31

It is not that I have anything against good works. In fact, works most definitely have a place in the second phase of our salvation—the Christian Life. But, as you can see in the above passage, when we are trusting in our works to save us from hell to heaven, there is no imputed righteousness (justification) from God. And when you are not righteous before a holy God, you are not saved from hell to Heaven.

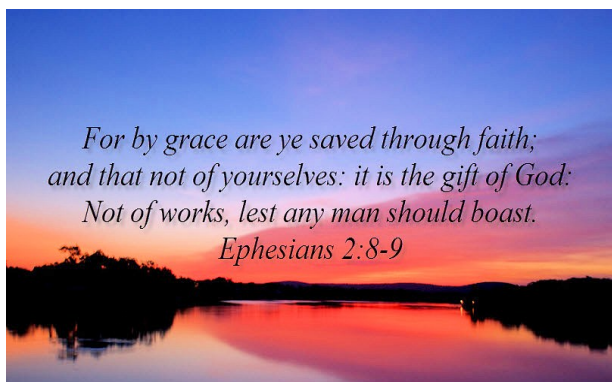
God does not want us to be trusting in the works that we do, He wants us to trust in the work His Son has already done. It is this work and only this work, to which He has so poignantly given His approval by raising His Son from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the place of greatest honor that can save. There is nothing any of us can do, especially as lost and spiritually dead individuals, that can compare with, or add to, the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Another theological error, very prevalent in our day, is promulgated by those who insist that our faith be

accompanied by certain qualities—things like commitment, surrender, or perseverance. In and of themselves, these are good things. But does a lost person, from his or her own resources, actually have the ability to do such things in a way that obligates God to save him or her? Absolutely not! God is not the least bit interested in what a spiritually-dead person thinks that he or she has to offer.

The problem with an emphasis on these qualities is illustrated by a man who boldly proclaimed to me, “No one has ever been saved by faith in Christ. Instead, a person is saved, when he wakes up one day and decides to be totally committed to Christ.” Do you see the shift in this person’s erroneous theology? In this erroneous approach, a person is not saved by the work of Christ, but instead by that person’s own commitment. Who gets the credit (glory)? Why, the person does for their commitment. After all, it was their commitment that secured their salvation! I hope you can see how much this approach contradicts the clear meaning of Scripture.

Furthermore, after studying the Bible carefully for years, I can tell you with certainty that what God really wants us to be enamored with is the work of His Son. He is not the least bit interested in



what we think we bring to the table when it comes to saving us from an eternal destiny in hell to one in heaven! Salvation is a gift from God to mankind. The most we can do is to reach out by faith and receive it. In fact,

if you have ever ministered the Gospel to a lost person, then you already know that coming to faith is more than enough of a hurdle for any person to overcome.

Thus, I have shown you my theology with respect to how a lost person changes their eternal destiny. I trust that you have noted its Biblical basis. I would be more than happy to sit down with you and open God's Word to explore this theology further.

The Christian Life

Now let's look more closely at the second phase of our salvation—how we are to live the Christian Life. How are we to *save* or make the most of the number of days that God gives us on this earth as an eternally-saved individual?

Good Theology

In the graphic below, I normally use the following Biblical phrases to describe God's intent for our Christian Lives: *redeeming the time* (Ephesians 5:16); *walk worthy* of who and what we are in Christ (Ephesians 4:1); and being *sanctified* (I Thessalonians 4:3).

But given our recent study in the Book of Ruth, and for simplicity's sake, I am simply going to label this phase *devotion*. As saved individuals, we are to live daily in complete devotion to our Lord and Savior. If we are not



living in devotion to Him, then we are not living the Christian Life to which we are called. By now we should expect to turn to the Scriptures to see if this position, this theology, is Biblical.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." Matthew 16:24

For this is the will of God, your sanctification. . .
I Thessalonians 4:3

And 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. II Corinthians 5:15

Let me briefly mention the first two passages, and then spend more time on the third. Notice how the passage in Matthew is directed to the disciples of Jesus. Disciples are followers. The issue here is not one of getting eternally saved, but one of the saved individuals following after Jesus in devotion. This interpretation fits the context as well, because, just before this verse, Peter has given a very clear testimony of his saving faith. Jesus is no longer calling Peter to believe, but to follow—and quite a challenging call it is.

In the second passage from I Thessalonians, we see as straightforward a statement as you will find in Scripture: The will of God for those who make up the Body of Christ is that they be *sanctified*. Sanctification can be described as being *set apart unto God in terms of purity, priority, and exclusivity*. To whom is this command to be sanctified directed? It is to the church in Thessalonica in particular, and the universal church—all those who have believed—in general.

Then I find the third passage in II Corinthians to be not only a wonderful statement of God's intent for the Christian Life, but also consistent with our understanding of the phases of salvation. For the fact that *Jesus died for*

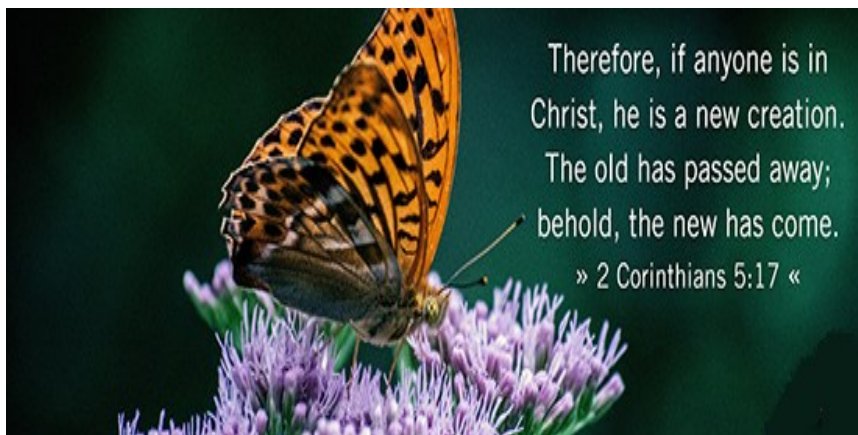
all is the basis of Phase 1 salvation—from hell to heaven. Jesus went to the cross bearing the sin of mankind, He died in our place that whosoever believes in Him—who He is and what He did for us—shall not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16) The work necessary to save from a destiny in hell has been done! But, sad to say, not all are going to believe.

But, once we believe and are saved, here is God's will:

. . . those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.

II Corinthians 5:15

Those who live are those who have trusted in Christ for their eternal salvation. They have been born again as *new creations* in Christ. And, these new creations are to no longer live for themselves, to no longer live self-centered lives, but instead to live for Jesus Christ. Doesn't that sound like living a life of devotion to Jesus Christ? It would certainly seem so!



Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
» 2 Corinthians 5:17 «

Furthermore, doesn't the word *devotion* include such concepts as commitment and surrender? Of course it does! For commitment and surrender most certainly have a place in the Christian Life, but good salvation theology keeps these concepts in their proper place.

Consider Romans 6:13:

**. . .yield yourselves unto God, as those that are
alive from the dead. . .**

There it is: To yield is to surrender! But note very carefully, it is not those who are lost who are told to yield, but only those who are alive from the dead! In a Biblical theology of salvation, it is only the saved who surrender themselves! God wants the new life surrendered to Him. He will never accept surrender of or from the old life.

Faltering Devotion

Now with respect to our Christian lives, let me ask a very important theological question: What happens if our devotion falters? What happens if our devotion isn't what it should be? Before answering this question, it is very important for you to know that, in the same way there are those who want to add works of behavior modification when it comes to changing our eternal destiny, there are those who want to qualify this idea of devotion in any number of ways—even so far as suggesting that through a lack of devotion you can lose God's promised eternal salvation.

I can assure you from personal experience, that if you don't accept their theology they will get mad at you, attempt to bully you, or give you any number of theology books or sermons to read to prove their view. These materials are typically full of error or half truths.

You will have to make up your own mind about what you believe. But let me make a suggestion as you consider your theology and there is really only one point of discussion: What does the Word of God have to say? The only thing that should ever cause us to change our minds is the simple process of the Holy Spirit using the Word of God to illumine our thinking so that we can

recognize the truth within the Word and use it to replace the error to which we had been bound. For my part, all I can say is that I have been diligent to study so that I might never be ashamed before God of how I have handled the Word of God.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. II Timothy 2:15

I have not hesitated to teach the whole counsel of God:

For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little. Isaiah 28:10

I have been determined to teach the Word of God in such a way that although it is not always what you want to hear, before God, it is what you need to hear.

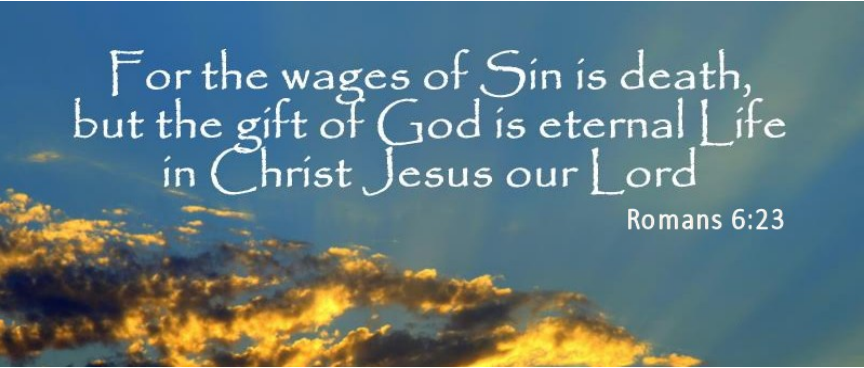
Preach the word, be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. . . II Timothy 4:2-3

Let's ask the question once again: What happens if your devotion falters? There are a number of answers to this question, but only one of them is good theology that rightly divides the Word of God. Let's work our way through some answers and see which is most Biblical.

Lose Your Salvation?

There is a theology that says when your devotion falters (enough), then you lose your salvation.

This means you are back to having an eternal destiny in the Lake of Fire. There are a couple of things you should be thinking. First, the obvious misnomer of calling the result of our salvation *eternal life*. For if you had it for a while, and lost it, it wasn't really eternal was



For the wages of Sin is death,
but the gift of God is eternal Life
in Christ Jesus our Lord

Romans 6:23

it? Do you think it possible that God *mislabeled* the life He provided when we believed?

Second, the equally obvious problem is that, if you could lose your salvation for a failure with respect to devotion, then you are not really saved by faith, but by devotion. And yet what does the Bible say:

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

Ephesians 2:8-9

Lastly, if there was any chance this theology could be true, I would really want to know how much I needed to falter before I lost my salvation. As you can imagine, those who promote this theology are somewhat fuzzy on the answer to that most important of questions! Let's see if we can look at some additional Scripture that will put this *bad theology* to rest.

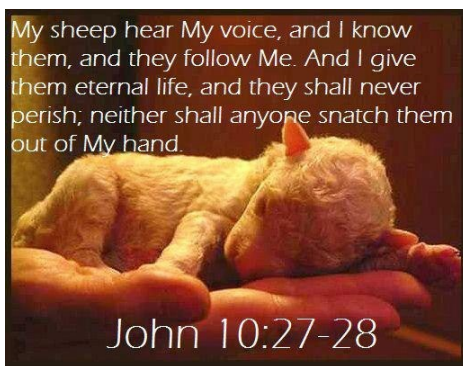
"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. . . you do not believe because you are not My sheep. My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. . . no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand."

John 10:24-29

So what is the Scripture telling us: Jesus' sheep are those who believe. To those who believe, Jesus gives eternal life, and those with the life He gives will never perish.

Why not? They will not perish because those who believe are, metaphorically speaking, in the hand of Jesus and of

God the Father. From those hands, there is no snatching away of the life that was given!



Here is a simple question for you: Is there any mention of devotion as a condition for either eternal life or the safeguarding of that life? None at all! Rather, that life hinges upon whether or not one has believed.

There are many, many other Scriptures that speak of the eternal security of anyone who has put his or her faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And, it is a good thing we have this assurance, because all of us fail many times and in many ways when it comes to living the kind of *devoted to Christ* lives that we should be living.

Biblically, we are not supposed to be wrestling with the issue of the number or the magnitude of our failures. Rather, we are supposed to be wrestling with how to grow spiritually into greater devotion by appropriating what God has provided. Do you see the world of difference between the two? Do you see how bad theology causes us to focus on the wrong thing? In short, having believed, the security of our eternal life is not dependent upon us, but upon Christ. Of the many possibilities, let me share with you what is perhaps the strongest Scriptural argument for the unchangeable status of one who has trusted in Christ for eternal life. To do so, we will

need to consider two Scriptures:

"But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house."

Matthew 12:28-29

For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13-14

In the context of Matthew 12, Jesus has been accused of healing a man physically, and freeing him from an indwelling demon, by the power of Satan. Jesus responds in a very interesting way. First, He says, "No, I did this by the Spirit of God!" Then, after stating that Satan's house is not divided, Jesus explains that the only way one of Satan's demons can be cast out is if Satan is first bound. In other words, the Lord Jesus bound the power of Satan and then cast out the demon to deliver the man from his bondage.

Now, carry that same idea forward and couple it with the passage from Colossians 1. Every member of the human race is born dead in trespasses and sin, and a member of Satan's domain. When we, as individuals, believe in the person and work of Christ, we are transferred by God Himself from the dominion of Satan to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. What is the only way that can happen? It can only happen if Satan is bound by the power of God. Satan is not happy about losing one of his subjects, but there is nothing he can do about it because the power of God has effected the transfer of another soul from death to life! Now ponder this! What would have to happen for a saved person to end up back in the dominion of Satan? The answer is that

somehow the Lord Jesus would have to be bound by Satan in order for him to regain what he had lost. And, everything about that idea is total heresy!

You see our eternal life does not depend upon us or upon our devotion! It is totally a work of the One who saved us and then it is guaranteed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Praise God for that!

We only squander time when we fret over sin that leads to a failure of devotion. We need to confess our sin, and then get back to those things which help us to spiritually grow that we might become that much more devoted to our wonderful Savior.

Never Saved?

Let's move on to another theological system and the way it deals with a failure of devotion. **This theology says that, when our devotion falters, it simply proves that we were never saved to begin with.** If this theology is true, then we would expect to find the following kinds of things in Scripture: The test of whether or not one is saved would be that of spiritual devotion and, furthermore, all *true* believers would be guaranteed to be devoted believers. Let's take these one at a time.

Salvation Test

When we turn to the Scriptures, what do we find as the test of whether or not a person has eternal life?

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 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.

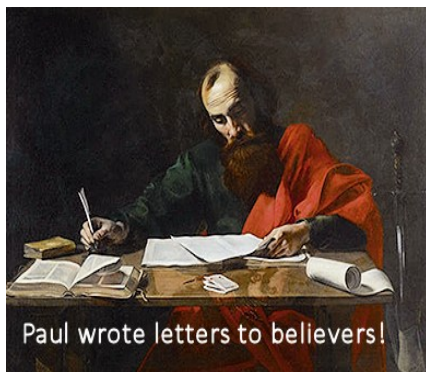
I John 5:11-13

Do you see that this Scripture takes us back to theology we have already covered—as it should? The only test

for whether or not a person has eternal life is whether or not they have believed! If they have believed, then they have the Son. If they have not believed, they do not have the Son and will not see life. (John 3:36) So it would be an error in theology to make devotion the test of eternal life when it is clearly a matter of whether or not one has believed!

There are three things to note about the theological error propagated by this never-saved theology: the purpose of the Epistles, the definition of failure of devotion, and the personality of the proponents.

The Purpose of the Epistles. Ask yourself, what is the purpose of the New Testament epistles? Those who hold to the never-saved theology are forced to say that the Epistles warn people who are not devoted about their lostness. First, is a failure of devotion the problem among the lost? Or, is their problem one of unbelief with respect to the person and work of Christ?



The Holy Spirit in no uncertain terms makes clear that the issue is one of unbelief! (John 16:8-9)

Further, to whom are all these New Testament epistles addressed? The epistles are addressed to the Church at Rome, to the church at Ephesus, to the church of Thessalonica, and so on. Paul and the other writers of the New Testament epistles are writing to the Church—to those who responded to their Gospel ministry and now need to continue growing. They are writing to believers! To interpret the bulk of the New Testament epistles as directed to the lost, or to a mixture of lost and saved, is to hopelessly confuse their message.

We find in these letters to the Church one warning after another to avoid those things which will lead to a failure of devotion and the promotion of those things which will reinforce devotion. Why is that so strongly the message of the epistles? Because believers, especially new ones, are so prone to fail in the area of devotion that they need to be taught about the pitfalls, and then carefully and repetitively instructed about how to make progress with respect to their spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth directly contributes to a devoted Christian Life. Here is just one clear example from Scripture. In I Corinthians 10:1-5, Paul makes clear that the Exodus generation believed in Christ, but died short of the Promised Land because of discipline. Then, starting in Verse 6, Paul applies this lesson to the Corinthian church:

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

I Corinthians 10:6

The Exodus generation are examples to both Paul and to the church in Corinth—to believers! After cautioning believers against a whole list of sins, Paul summarizes:

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

I Corinthians 10: 11-13

The above guidance becomes absolute gibberish if applied to the unbeliever:

- Does the unbeliever need to be careful to not fall? They are already fallen.

- Is temptation an issue for the lost?
- Does God promise to uphold a lost person when tempted?

On the contrary, Paul is warning believers! For like the saved Exodus generation, they too can fall into sin and they need to be alert against doing so! But thank God that He will not allow His children to be tempted beyond what they can bear, but in grace will provide for them to withstand every trial. You cannot claim this promise for the believer without also recognizing the believer's potential to get tangled up in all manner of sin.



These truths are side by side in the same text.

As for the devoted Christian Life being guaranteed for every *true* believer, consider this small sampling of Scripture:

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall! I Corinthians 10:12

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. I Corinthians 16:13

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Galatians 5:16

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Ephesians 6:11

Do not the above verses clearly imply: the Christian can fall, the Christian can crumble in the faith, the Christian can gratify the sin nature and the Christian can fall to one of the devil's schemes?

It would seem quite clear, based upon the cautionary tone of God's Word, that living the Christian Life is anything but automatic. It would seem that the Christian life is much more like something to which we must pay very close attention, lest our devotion to the things of the Lord fall far short in His estimation.

The Definition of Failure of Devotion. There is a second problem with a theology that says a failure of devotion means absence of ever having been saved—regardless of a clear testimony of belief. The question must be answered, "What failure of devotion are we talking about?" The usual answer includes either sins they believe to be particularly bad, or sins perpetuated over a period of time. So then I want to know—what specific sins and for how long a time?

From that point, those who support this theology will come up with answers that would mean King David was never saved, the apostle Peter was never saved, Mark the writer of the Gospel by his name was not saved at the point he accompanied Paul and Barnabas—and on it goes. In short, it is impossible to quantify what sins might qualify and for how long you must persist in those sins to prove you were never saved. Perhaps the



answers cannot be quantified because the Word of God teaches no such thing.

Furthermore, this creates a very unhealthy subjectivity in the life of the individual who is very likely struggling with an ongoing area of sin in his or her life. Only an erroneous theology would cause our sin to loom larger in our thinking than the finished work of the cross which decisively dealt with those sins and paid their penalty *in full!*

The Personality of the Proponents. Would you think that the Christian Life is limited to a certain kind of personality? I hope your response is, "Absolutely not!" This brings us to a third thing of which you should be aware regarding the position that devotion is the test of one's salvation. For in my own experience, the strongest voices for this bad theology come from dominating personality types. It is as if they are trying to force others to measure up to the life they are demanding of themselves.

When pressed on this very subject, one of the strongest voices for this view admitted, "I want people to avoid the mistakes I made!" Although admirable, is that a good enough reason for teaching error with respect to the theology of our Phase 2 salvation? I'll leave it up to you to decide. As for me, there is never a reason good enough to leave the truth of the Word for error—even if it is well-intentioned error.

Guidance in God's Word

Surely there must be clear guidance within God's Word with respect to the Christian Life and God's intent for disciples who *take up their cross daily and follow the Lord Jesus!* Of course there is. So let's ask the question for a third, and final, time: What happens if our devotion falters?

Let me share what the Scriptures have to say on this matter, and in doing so, break it into two separate considerations. Biblical theology tells us that when our devotion falters, we should:

- **Recover As Soon As Possible.** A failure of devotion is something from which to recover as soon as possible by using the means God has provided. Then, get back to living a devoted life—once again, by making use of the means God has provided.
- **Know Your Salvation Is Secure.** No matter the consequences, and there may be some from your lapse, your salvation is secure.

Recover As Soon As Possible

Let's begin with God's provision for recovering from any failure, including a failure in the area of devotion to Him.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins. . .

I John 2:1-2

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I John 1:9



There are two things to note about recovering from a failure of devotion:

1. First, failure can lead to debilitating guilt. That guilt is not of God, but of the evil one. For I John tells us clearly what Jesus Christ is doing when we fail—He is speaking to the Father on our behalf, for He has already satisfied the just demands of the Father for our failure. That's what the word propitiation means—satisfaction. Jesus satisfied the justice of God when He was judged for our failures—all of them—at the cross.

That is the reason, as the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins, we can confess them and know they are forgiven! They are forgiven because they have already been paid for by Christ's death on our behalf. When our devotion falters, we need to recover as absolutely quickly as possible. No wallowing in sin, no feeling sorry for ourselves, and no wondering if we are still saved. Rather, we need to appropriate what God has provided and restore our relationship with Him before any more damage is done.

2. Then, once we are back to following after the Lord, it is essential that we realize that in the same way God provided for our salvation from a destiny in hell to one in heaven, He has also provided for us the means of living the Christian Life. This provision includes not only the means of recovery from failure, but also the means of moving ahead in developing a life fully devoted to Christ.

So I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Galatians 5:16

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. . .

Colossians 3:16

As you can see, the means that God has provided to live the Christian Life are centered in His provision of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. I think of it this way: a life that is guided by the Word of God and enabled by the Spirit of God will most certainly be a devoted life that is pleasing to the Lord.

Because we have been talking so much about devotion, I want to make one thing very clear: I am not suggesting that you try your hardest, as a Christian, to be devoted to the Lord. On the contrary, I am suggesting that when you are living the Christian Life, by appropriating what God has provided in order to live it, you will be living a life devoted to Him. See this for yourself in the following Scripture:

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it. I Thessalonians 5:23

Who is going to cause us to be sanctified—set apart in devotion? He is the One who will do it! And, naturally, there is no boasting for what our Lord does through us!

Know Your Salvation Is Secure

Since I have shared with you what I believe to be the Biblical theology of salvation, perhaps you will understand what drives my ministry as a pastor. It is my desire to reach the lost with the truth of the Gospel that they might receive the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. And, what a burden is removed for the lost when they turn from the bondage of never-ending works, to the grace of God that is available through faith in Christ Jesus!

Then, I have such a sense of calling to clearly and Biblically teach the means by which every single believer

would walk in beautiful, God-pleasing devotion to their Lord and Savior—secure in their salvation. Now you know why I teach that extra bit too long—to nudge you that much more toward conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ. And, for those who fall from devotion, my burden is to reach them with the grace of God that they would not squander a single moment in carnality or guilt, and instead return to running the race for Jesus.

Even for those who have ignored the issue of devotion while caught up in the things of this world, I am motivated to challenge them with the truth that it is not too late! For we can all confess our failings, we can all trust in the advocacy of Jesus Christ on our behalf, and we can all be found living in devotion to our Savior when He either comes to receive us to Himself or calls us home to be with Him forever.

Let me show you a passage I find so encouraging when it comes to ministry:

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Luke 22:31-32

Peter, trusting in himself, had confidently declared that, though all others would fall away, he would never desert Jesus. Jesus has, in turn, revealed to Peter that he has



made a promise he has no strength to keep because Peter will, in fact, deny Jesus three times. But note in the previous Scripture what Jesus tells Peter. Jesus is going to pray for Peter in his failure. Of course He is! For Jesus,

Therefore He is able to save
completely those who
come to God through Him,
because He always lives
to intercede for them.

Hebrews 7:25

...is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.

Hebrews 7:25

Note the prayer focus on the need for faith in failure. For, when we fail in our devotion, we need to have faith that confession will lead to complete forgiveness, and faith the Lord will once again lead by His Word and enable by His Spirit. When we trust Him to do this, the most marvelous thing can happen—the Lord Jesus entrusts us with ministry! For once Peter was back living in devotion to His Savior, the Lord had ministry for Him, and that ministry eventually included the souls saved and churches planted throughout Asia Minor.

There are “bad theologies” that will take away Peter’s salvation, or deny that he was ever saved because he strayed in his devotion. In contrast, I am so glad that the Bible has taught me of a salvation that begins as an eternal gift and then provides everything I need to lead a devoted life. When I fail, I know He is there to convict me of my need to return, to intercede on my behalf that I would be saved to the uttermost, and then He returns me to whatever ministry would bring glory to Him. What a great Savior we have! As for those other theologies—they just don’t fit the Word of God, and they

don't offer what those of us who struggle need most to know—our eternal security and God's unfailing love. And that's why I am trying to make these essential theological issues crystal clear to you.

One More Thing to Do

Those who wish to attack the Biblical theology of salvation that I have laid out for you from God's Word will typically do so with one of two accusations:

1. Your theology promotes a sloppy Christian Life.
2. Your theology lets people *get away with things*.

Let's address these charges one at a time.

Promotes a Sloppy Christian Life

The accusation is that any theology that highlights the Biblical emphasis on God's grace in providing for both Phase 1 and 2 of our salvation promotes a sloppy Christian Life. Is that what the Word has to say?

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.

Titus 2:11-14

Did you notice that the first thing the grace of God teaches us to do is to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions? That is exactly the same thing as:

. . .to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. Ephesians 4:22

Then on the positive side, grace teaches us to live self-controlled upright and godly lives—to be a pure people who see themselves as exclusively the Lord’s and eager to do that which is good. In other words:

. .to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:24

Now, I am wondering what part of these instructions promote a *sloppy Christian Life*. Frankly, the Biblical picture is one of a believer devoted to His Lord and it is a thing of beauty to behold. The Christian Life is a challenge to live. It takes time to grow into and learn how to appropriate what God in grace provides to live such a life. But there is absolutely nothing with which to find fault in such a theology of salvation.

Lets People Get Away with Things

The second common allegation against a grace theology that understands man’s propensity for failure and allows for recovery is that it lets people *get away* with things. Let’s see how the Scriptures describe this getting away with things:

My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.

Hebrews 12:5-6

So I declared on oath in My anger, “They shall never enter My rest.”

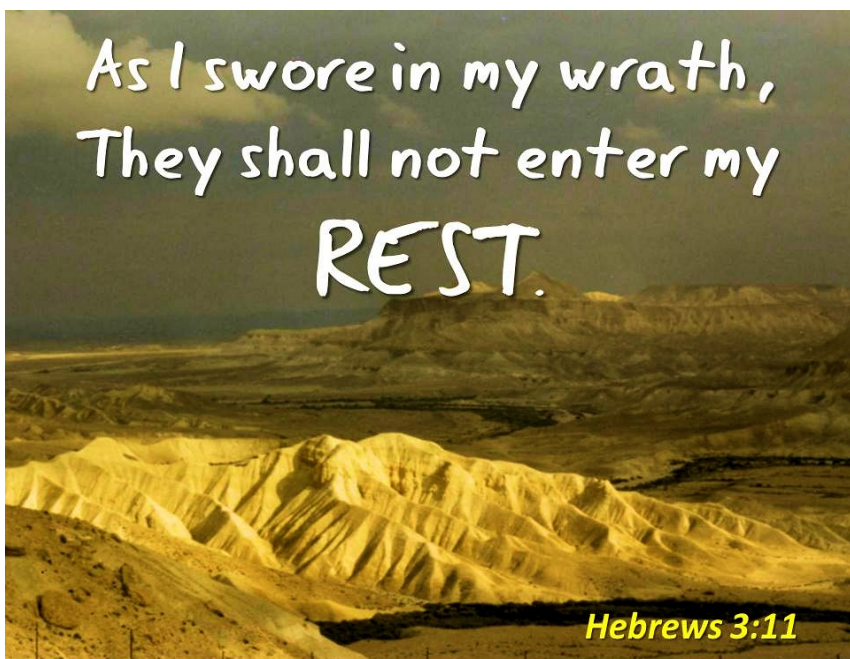
Hebrews 3:11

The passage from Hebrews 12 teaches us that, as believers, we can expect discipline from the Lord. Certainly, that discipline will include rebuke for failure in the area of devotion. When the Lord rebukes or punishes, note that it is the child of God who undergoes this family discipline. It is not the lost! That word *punish* is far too soft a translation for the Greek word, which means *to*

scourge as with a whip. So I am wondering how being *scourged* by the Lord Himself is in any way getting away with something.

It gets even more difficult to sustain this false attack against the grace of God when we unpack Hebrews 3:11. For this is a reference to God's discipline upon the Exodus generation. Those led out of Egypt came out under the blood of the Passover Lamb and were said to have drunk of the Rock of Christ who delivered them. They were believers, but they failed the test of devotion. For rather than learning to trust their loving Savior, at every new challenge they defaulted back to unbelief. So, what did God do? He declared that the generation of those who failed to follow Him in devotion, would not enter the land of promise but would instead die in the wilderness.

This is a physical analog for our spiritual situation—and that is exactly how the New Testament book of Hebrews



presents it. Should we, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, fail to grow into the kind of devoted Christian Life to which we are called, then we can expect to spend our lives outside the *place of blessing* that God has for us. We will *die in the wilderness*—spiritually speaking.

Now I must admit that I am astonished that anyone would conclude that this is *getting away* with something. If spending 40 years out of the place of blessing and dying in the wilderness is living it up, their idea of getting away with something is totally different from mine.

To miss a life of abiding in Jesus Christ for the things of this world is to miss the abundant life, and that is missing the most important thing there is in time. This is all I need to know to prompt me to pursue devotion to the Lord.

Let me show you a practical and gripping example of what is at stake. You may find it helpful to read Acts 5:1-11, as I am going to reference just two verses:

. . .you have lied to the Holy Spirit. . . Acts 5:3

How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?
Acts 5:9

Here is the backstory for these two verses. Barnabas sold a piece of property and gave the proceeds to the fledgling church in Jerusalem. Apparently, this was well known and brought him a certain degree of renown. Ananias and his wife Sapphira lusted after this same renown and sold a piece of land themselves. But here is the rub, they didn't want to give up all of the proceeds for the land they sold. They wanted the renown, but also wanted to retain some of the funds. So they gave a portion of the proceeds to the church, but represented it as if they gave everything. As a result, Ananias is disciplined in Acts 5:5 for lying to the Holy Spirit by being put

to death. Then, his wife Sapphira repeats the lie and receives the same discipline in Verse 10.

As you can imagine, those holding to the false theology we discussed earlier simply dismiss Ananias and Sapphira as unbelievers. If you falter in your devotion, you were never saved to begin with! But does that theology stand the test of Scripture? Once again, the answer is clearly, "No!"



First, the two of them are presented as part of the church in Jerusalem without qualification. Second, and most importantly, their sin is one of lying to the Holy Spirit. It is a sin of thinking that they could act in a duplicitous manner and God wouldn't know or couldn't act. They wanted to be seen as pillars of the church while enjoying the worldly aspects of wealth.

Now let me ask you a question: If every unbeliever who lied to the Holy Spirit and lived as if God wasn't there, was put to death, would there be a single unbeliever alive on the planet? In fact, this is the kind of behavior we expect from unbelievers. We don't make a big deal over it because we know their single biggest need is to first get saved from hell to heaven.

On the other hand, when this kind of stuff happens among the saved, among those who are called to *"come out from the world and be separate from it"*, watch out! For discipline is sure to come. So the short and sweet of it is that Ananias and Sapphira were believers who were

severely disciplined for their sin—their failure to be devoted followers of Christ. I don't know about you, but this teaches me a very valuable lesson! And, that lesson most certainly does not lead to a sloppy life, nor can I for a moment think of them as getting away with anything. On the contrary, they paid dearly for their sin.

In fact, this is exactly the lesson that was brought home to the early church. For following the death of Ananias and Sapphira:

Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. Acts 5:11

Notice, it was the Church—believers—who learned a lesson from the discipline within.

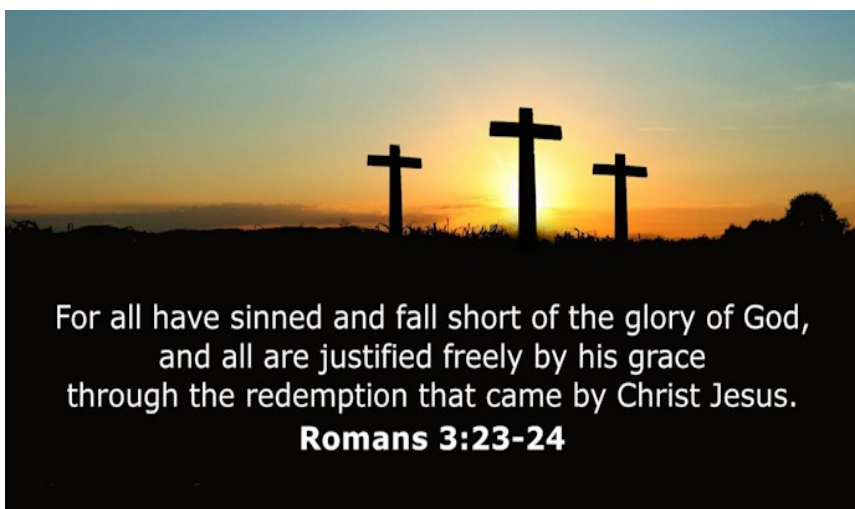
Dangers of Bad Theology

Our discussion highlights two dangers associated with bad theology—dangers I am trying to help you avoid:

1. Bad theology inhibits the voice of God from speaking out of the Scriptures to us. Bad theology, instead, forces the message of man into the Scriptures. The danger inherent in this is that the flow is in the wrong direction. The two erroneous theologies we have considered must force themselves on the text of Acts 5 so that Ananias and Sapphira are either seen as having lost their salvation or never having it to begin with. But neither of those two things are mentioned anywhere in the text. Instead, if we let the text of Scripture speak to us, we see the danger associated with a believer lying to the Holy Spirit. And, we develop a healthy respect for God's ability to reach in at any time and anywhere to discipline His children. What a terrible error it is to let bad theology cloud the message from God by forcing the reasoning of man into the text of Scripture.

2. The second danger of bad theology is how it obfuscates—renders obscure or unintelligible—God’s message to His people! Once your theology wrongly forces you to take the position that failures in devotion are simply acts of unbelievers, then the message of Acts 5 no longer has anything to teach the *true* believer, other than perhaps to be thankful they are not one of *those* unbelievers.

What a terrible and dangerous thing to do with a message from God to the Church. Acts is a book about the development of the Church. It is not primarily for the unbeliever, it is for the believer. The discipline God brought on Ananias and Sapphira, within the context of the fragile early church, brought great Fear of the Lord upon the believers. (Acts 5:11) In other words, the text clearly indicates that God delivered a message to believers through the punishment inflicted on two believers. A failure of devotion is serious business among God’s people. Any theology that obfuscates that message is a great danger to the Body of Christ indeed! Frankly, I would be afraid to do so!



For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
and all are justified freely by his grace
through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:23-24

Just to reinforce how systematically coherent is the Word of God, look at what John says:

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray. . . There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. I John 5:16-17

Did you notice that it is a *brother* who can commit a sin that leads to physical death? That was the case with Ananias and Sapphira. And, we are instructed not to mourn for them in prayer! In other words, we don't wring our hands over those who died under Divine discipline; but instead, pray earnestly for those who are yet able to repent. When allowed to speak for themselves, the Scriptures give some very serious warnings to God's people, don't they?

In Closing

Not all are going to believe, and we know that, but we dare not let that deter us from holding out the Word of Life because Jesus died for the sins of the entire human race. For that reason He is:

. . .not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. II Peter 3:9

Likewise, not all who believe are going to be as devoted as they should. In fact, I dare say that none of us are going to be as devoted as we should be. For the Christian Life has a component of growth and is done within a fallen body in which the sin nature remains. Nonetheless, God has:

. . .given us everything we need for life and godliness. . . II Peter 1:3

That would mean that we have everything we need in order to live a life devoted to Him! Thus, I unabashedly

teach devotion. It is the only kind of Christian Life to which we—every single child of God—are called. It is the only outcome compatible with our so-great salvation in Christ. It is the outcome for which God has provided everything necessary, and it is the outcome that is most certainly in our best interests in both time and eternity.

At the same time, I am going to be Biblically consistent in addressing God's provision for recovery from failure in such a way as to minimize failure for those who stumble and reach out with the hope of restoration for those who have failed—whether the time of failure be long or short. This is my theology from much personal study. This is what I preach, and it is all I can preach for it is what the Word of God teaches. Now let me turn this discussion back to you:

**Can you articulate your theology of salvation?
And, is it Biblical?**

There are many competing voices out there—including mine as your pastor and Bible teacher. Ultimately, it is not about what any person teaches. It is about what God has communicated and preserved in His Word. For there is only one true theology, and our goal is to line up with it! Pursue it with me, or pursue it with someone else. But pursue the truth every day until Phase 3 of your salvation—the day you stand in glory in the presence of your Lord and Savior:



...then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

I Corinthians 13:12

May God bless you as you take up what He has provided to live a life of devotion to Him!



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