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LETTER TO A FRIEND

Concerning the So-Called 'Lordship Salvation'

by John Piper

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LETTER TO A FRIEND

Explanatory Note: In the February 1989 issue of *The Standard*, the journal for news and comment of the Baptist General Conference, I published a very affirming review of John MacArthur's book, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Zondervan, 1988). One respected and effective minister of our fellowship responded to me with serious concern about what I was saying. The gist of his concern is seen in a few excerpts from his letter. I am going to change a few details so as not to draw attention to any one individual, because my friend speaks for many.

He said, "Near the age of fifteen I accepted Christ as my Savior. As I look back on my life, I can see He had powerful influence during my late teen years and early twenties. In my late twenties I began to be aware of the concept of

Christ as Lord. As I investigated that concept and struggled with it, I realized that for Christ to be Lord, I had to submit everything to Him. In my early thirties I did just that. The concept of 'lordship salvation' that you support would mean that had I died at age twenty-two, that is, before Christ was Lord, I would not have gone to Heaven."

Dear Friend!

Thank you for taking time and interest to respond to my review of John MacArthur's book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*. I have heard of your love for Christ and your faithfulness in evangelism and discipling. This is plain also from your response. And I thank God for it. I hope these things can be discussed in a way that will minimize widespread misunderstanding. If you see any misrepresentations of your thinking please let me know.

Interpreting Two-Stage Experiences

Do you know what I think the biggest problem is between the way I see things and the way you see things? It is not so much that I deny your experience, but rather that I disagree with the way you describe it or interpret it. I can accept that you received Christ as your Savior near the age of fifteen, and that you were at that moment savingly converted. I praise God that he opened your eyes like Lydia (Act 16:14) and that he drew you to his Son (Joh 6:44) and took out the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh (Eze 36:26) and granted you to repent (2Ti 2:25) and believe (Phi 1:29) and be saved totally by grace apart from any works (Eph 2:8).

Not only that, I can accept that some years later, when you were in your early thirties, you had another remarkable experience with Christ in which you made a decisive commitment to him as Lord and submitted everything in your life to him. This experience, or something like it, is told again and again in my church as people give their testimonies.

I highlight the word experience, because my guess is that your description of it has been significantly influenced by a popular, contemporary paradigm which, in my judgment, is not fully biblical. I think I can show this from Scripture. But the hundreds of testimonies I have listened to over the years also bear this out.

One can tell pretty quickly the people who have been taught to describe their experience in this two-stage, Savior-Lord sequence. As I have queried some of these people, it has become clear to me that the secondary nature of the description sometimes is so tied in with the genuineness of the experience that to question the description is like calling into question the experience, which I hesitate to do. God alone is the final judge of a person's true experience of salvation. But the Bible is the judge of how we should describe it.

When I have suggested to others another way of describing what has happened to them, they have often seen truth in what I say and dropped the two-step, Savior-Lord paradigm as sub-biblical and misleading.

A Converted Catholic Monk

I recall one fellow in particular from South Africa, a converted Catholic monk. He was converted remarkably by the sovereign work of God one night during his evening prayers in the monastery. He knew he was a new person the next morning when, instead of getting angry at the bothersome 3 A.M. prayers of his aged neighbor, he felt pity and compassion for him.

His life typically had its ups and downs as he discovered more and more fully the meaning of belonging to Jesus. Having left the monastery, he joined a ministry in South Africa. Through this ministry he learned to interpret his experience and give his testimony in a two-stage, Savior-Lord sequence. He spoke of conversion to Christ as Savior and of a later submission to him as Lord.

But as he sat at our dinner table one Sunday after service, telling his story, I could tell that things simply did not jive. The paradigm did not work. His experience, as it came out in his longer interaction with us, simply did not fit. So I said to him (what I think I would say to you if I were talking to you now), "You know, Bill (not his real name), I think Jesus was your Lord before that later act of submission. I think he was your Lord the night you were converted, and since then your experience has been one of more and more yieldedness to his sovereign rights as Lord over your life. And I don't think that you have bowed to his lordship consistently since that time you 'made him Lord'. You are not fully yielded now or you would be sinless. But he is still your Lord now. And you were not fully yielded then, but he was your Lord then."

Bill was dumbfounded that I would call his testimony into question. No one had ever spoken to him like this. He had only heard one paradigm for describing his experience. He sat in silence for a few minutes and then said, "You know, I think you're right." And he went on to say that it had never felt quite right and that what I said seemed to make more sense out of the Scriptures as well as his experience.

My Father, the Evangelist

My own father is a full-time evangelist and has led thousands of souls to Christ over the last fifty years of faithful gospel ministry. I just called him in Easley, South Carolina, to have him rehearse for me his experience and give me a reading as an evangelist on the two-step, Savior-Lord paradigm.

He said that he used to talk that way but has given it up in recent years (he just turned seventy-two) because of how much damage he saw it doing to the churches as it encouraged people who were not saved to think they were. He quoted Romans 10:9 on the phone and said, "If a person does not have Jesus as Lord, he does not have him at all."

He himself received Christ at the age of six at his mother's knee. Then as a teenager in 1934 during special services at his dad's church in Reading, Pennsylvania, he was brought under deep conviction of the weakness of his life and the cowardice of his witness. He went forward and "surrendered totally to the Lord." That was the first time, he said, that he knew the fullness of the Spirit in his life, and he became powerfully courageous, even standing up the next day in his public high school and preaching for twenty minutes.

But he does not say Jesus was not his Lord before that experience of deeper surrender. Rather he talks of coming more fully to submit to his lordship which had reigned savingly over his life for the past ten years but had allowed him to have many struggles and come to a crisis of commitment.

Then at about the age of thirty there was another crisis. He was drowning in debt and experiencing depression and insomnia. He began to read a book by James McConkey about submission to God. The basis of the book was Psalm 37:4-5, and the author spoke of committing all to God and submitting to God's sovereign plan for your life and resting in him. My father said that he realized at that point, in spite of the great power in his life for saving souls, he was not totally submitted to God. He bowed and gave up all to the Lord again. He said he found a peace beyond anything he had ever known.

His point was, and my point is, that from the time of our first saving acceptance of Christ, he is our King and Lord and Savior and Priest and Prophet and Counselor. All that he is, he is for those who are his. And then begins a life of faltering and growing yieldedness to Christ in all that he is. This can come in the form of decisive crises, or in the form of gradually growing commitment, or in the form of daily surrenderings. The lordship of Christ, in reality, is something that is not discovered and yielded to once, but thousands of times. It is yieldedness to his lordship that is at stake every time we are tempted to sin-every day.

He Was My Lord, Then I "Made Him Savior."

I have another friend who tells his testimony like this: I received Jesus as my Lord when I was a child, but it was many years before I discovered how much he wanted to save me from my sins of lust and greed and pride. Then I had a powerful encounter with Jesus and discovered this great saving intention and "made him my Savior" in a new and powerful way.

That has as much to say for it as the reverse paradigm. We would probably want to admonish him that he must have received Jesus as Savior at the beginning in some sense. He would have to admit that, I think, just as I think you would have to admit that you received Jesus as Lord in some sense when you were first saved.

There are even indications in your response to me that Jesus was the Lord of your life before the crisis experience in your early thirties. One indication is your statement that Christ "had a powerful influence during my late teen years and early twenties." Could we not say that this word "powerful" means that Jesus had a "lordly" influence in your life in those years? Was he passive or was he exerting the power of his reign as Lord? If you were being powerfully influenced by the risen Jesus, it was the Lord who was influencing you, for only as Lord does Christ reign and work among his people.

You may say, "But I did not relate to him as Lord in those years." I wonder if that is exactly true? I wonder about this because something may be real even when we don't understand it fully or even use the right language to describe it. For example, is a person not "born again" just because he has never heard the term "born again" and does not relate to Jesus in those terms but only in terms of faith and forgiveness and atonement? No. A person is just as born again if he believes in Jesus, even if he has never heard of the word "regeneration" or the term "born again." Many have been born again and saved through Gospel tracts which say nothing about the term "rebirth."

So I reckon it is possible that many people "have Jesus as their Lord" who don't think much about that term (as evidently you didn't for ten years after your conversion). If you were not dealing with Christ as one who authoritatively calls for newness of life, you would probably have been changed very little. But your testimony is that Christ "had a powerful influence" on your life in those early days. I believe you were dealing with him as your Lord even though that may not have been a title you fully understood. I'm sure I didn't in my earliest days as a believer.

In fact none of us yet understands the full implications of the lordship of Christ on our lives. I am struggling every day to know what the Lord is requiring of me in specific choices among good options. I am learning every day the extent of his lordly control of the world and his mysterious ways of fulfilling his promises as Lord of my life and my church. Submitting to the lordship of Christ is a lifelong activity. It must be renewed every day in many acts of trust and obedience. Submission to Christ's lordship is not merely a once-for-all experience.

Rejecting Christ as Lord and Still Saved?

I say "not merely" because in a sense it is a once-for-all experience. I believe this is conversion. And if I understand the main difference between us, it is right here. You seem to say that a person can be converted and saved even if they reject the claim of Jesus to be their Lord. I may be wrong here. But that seems to be the implication of what you are saying. For if you

are only saying that a person can be saved and not know fully the implications of Christ's lordship, then we have no argument on this point.

But your response goes further than that, I think, and says that people "do not have Christ as Lord" and yet are saved. I take the phrase "do not have Christ as Lord" to mean "reject his lordship." Otherwise you would only be saying that all saved people own Jesus as Lord of their lives but live out that submission in greater or lesser degrees of consistency. But that is what I am saying. There would be no dispute.

So I take it that you are saying something much more extreme, namely, that people can actually be presented with the claims of Christ as Lord and say, "No, I don't want to bow to him as Lord, and I do not accept his claim on my life as authoritative Guide and Teacher," but still be saved (if they believe that he died for them!). If that is what you are saying, then there is a great difference between us indeed. And not only between you and me, but between you and centuries of Christian orthodoxy.

No Assurance While Intent on Sin

The Bible makes it plain, I believe, that people who persistently refuse the command of Jesus' lordship have no warrant for believing that they are saved. Such people should not be comforted that they are saved simply because there was a time when they "believed" gospel facts or walked an aisle or signed a card or prayed a prayer. In fact, Jesus seems far more eager to explode the assurance of false "professions of faith" than he is to give assurance to people who are intent on living in sin. Where does he ever bolster the "eternal security" of a person unwilling to forsake sin?

I am not saying that only perfect people are saved. There are no perfect people on this earth. We sin every day, and every good work we do is tainted with sinful remnants of corruption. I am saying that a person who goes on willfully rejecting the commands of Jesus for his life has no warrant for salvation. The evidence for this is found in the passages of Scripture listed at the end of this letter.

To clear up just what I think the Bible teaches about salvation by faith, I'd like to respond to some other specific points in your letter that seem to reflect either a misunderstanding of what I am saying or a rejection (without sufficient warrant) of what I am saying.

If I Died Before Making Jesus Lord

1. You say, "The concept of 'lordship salvation' would mean that had I died at age twenty-two, that is, before Christ was Lord, I would not have gone to Heaven."

I think I have said enough above to assure you that my interpretation of your experience is a very hopeful one. I do think you would have gone to heaven. But, oh, how I wish you could feel how St. Paul and Jesus and all the great, godly spokesmen of Christian orthodoxy for 1900 years would cringe at hearing the words "before Christ was Lord"!

Where in the New Testament can you find anything close to such a description of a true believer? This way of talking about an immature believer has no warrant in the New Testament. And it is so misleading!

It is misleading because Christ is Lord whether we acknowledge that or not (Act 2:36; Phi 2:11). And it is misleading because he is the Lord of every true believer whether we grasp this fully or obey him fully or not.

Just consider these few observations. Dozens of times, in writing to all the believers of a church, Paul refers to Jesus as "our Lord." Some of these places have to take in all the believers, not just those who are more mature in their devotion to Christ. For example, Romans 8:39 is a text you would probably want to use to encourage a faltering believer that he was secure in the arms of God. Yet the verse says that nothing will separate us from "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If the verse is to comfort the reader, the reader has to see himself in the "our." Paul has no intention here of saying that there are some Christians who do not have Jesus as Lord and thus do not have security. All true Christians can say "our Lord" and be included here. (The same thing could be said of Romans 6:23.)

Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." It is a frightening thing, in view of this verse, to tell people that they do not have to confess Jesus as Lord in order to be saved. That is just the opposite of what scripture says. (Romans 10:13 is just as strong.)

In Romans 14:7-8, Paul says, "None of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." Notice the phrase "none of us." There is no group of Christians who do not live to the Lord. We may do it imperfectly and haltingly. But to belong to the Lord is to live to the Lord.

Paul simply identifies Christians in 1 Corinthians 1:2 as "all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours." He can do this because becoming a Christian means confessing Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9) and calling on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13).

Paul described the content of his gospel preaching like this: "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5). And in 1 Thessalonians 1:8 he says that the spreading of this gospel by the churches is the sound-

ing forth of “the Word of the Lord.” This is not a second-stage “discipleship” message. This is what he preached as the gospel.

You Did Not Receive a Half-Christ

In Colossians 2:6 Paul says, “As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him.” This is the way we should speak to new believers: you received Jesus in all his offices when you received him for salvation. You did not receive a half-Christ. He is Prophet, Priest and King—and he is this for you. This is the One you received. Now live in him in a way that befits his offices. If you reject him in any of his offices, you reject the Christ and are left with one of your own making who cannot save.

There are many other uses of the term “Lord” in the New Testament that show that Paul and the others never conceived of the possibility of saying that a person could be saved and “not have Jesus as Lord.” It is not a biblical way of talking and it is dangerously misleading.

2. You say with regard to equipping people for evangelism, “We must have a concept that is transferable. If we have to develop the concept of ‘lordship salvation,’ the task becomes impossible. It will be difficult enough to equip our people to communicate salvation by faith.” There is one serious misunderstanding of “lordship salvation” in this quote and one questionable attitude to Scripture.

Lordship Salvation Is Salvation by Faith

2.1. The misunderstanding is the implication that lordship salvation is anything other than “salvation by faith.” Paul said to the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” He said, “Believe.” And he said, “Believe on the Lord.” Now that is lordship salvation and salvation by faith—both. The question is not whether salvation is by faith. It is (Eph 2:8). The question is first, What is faith? and second, Whom do we have faith in?

Paul’s answer is that we have faith in the Lord. This does not turn salvation into salvation by works. It simply means we have to know whom it is we are trusting.

The answer to the question, What is faith? is the most basic one in this whole controversy. It is not a simple mental assent to facts—not lordship facts and not Savior facts. It is a heartfelt coming to Christ and resting in him for what he is and what he offers. It is an act of the heart that no longer hates the light but comes to the light, because a new set of spiritual taste buds have been created and Christ now tastes satisfying to the soul. This notion of faith is taken mainly from the Gospel of John where, Jesus says, “I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (Joh 6:35). (See the texts at the end of this letter under the title “The Nature of Faith in the Gospel of John.”)

This view of faith implies that faith itself will inevitably wean a person away from sin because faith is resting in what Jesus has to offer, namely, the pathway of life. Obedience is not something artificially added to saving faith later after a second discovery in the Christian walk. It is what faith does because faith is the soul’s cleaving to Jesus for the forgiveness and guidance and hope it needs to be happy. If you don’t do what the doctor says, you don’t trust him.

So lordship salvation is not—emphatically not—anything other than salvation by faith (true faith) in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Does Experience or Scripture Define the Gospel?

2.2 Your quote also contains a questionable attitude to Scripture. I say questionable because I don’t think you really want to say what I hear you saying, namely, that our definition of evangelism and of the gospel must fit in with what we decide is effective and workable (transferable) whether or not it is out of sync with Scripture.

You say, “If we have to develop the concept of lordship salvation, the task becomes impossible.” Do you know what I hear in that sentence? I hear the words of the disciples after Jesus has turned the rich young ruler away unsaved because he would not submit to the demand of Jesus to stop loving his money. They say, “Who then can be saved?” And Jesus says, “With men it is impossible.”

It does not seem to me that your rejection of “lordship salvation” (because it would be “impossible” to teach) is in line with the attitude of Jesus. It is your judgment call that this is “impossible,” not the Bible’s. The Bible does not say that this kind of evangelism is impossible, and Jesus and the apostles demonstrate with their lives that it is not.

Jesus said that the way is hard that leads to life and few there be that find it (Mat 7:14). Could it be that we are so bent on having immediate, measurable results that we have defined the gospel and evangelism in a way that enables people to understand and respond even without spiritual comprehension and heart change? I fear this is largely why we are so weak as a church. The very foundations have been laid wrongly.

Staggeringly Unbiblical

3. You say, “One of my primary objectives [in discipling four men] is to bring them to a point where Christ becomes Lord. That is a primary task of discipleship.”

I find these words staggeringly unbiblical! Nowhere! Nowhere in the New Testament can you find such an idea, that mature Christians should suggest to newer believers that Christ is not their Lord. Do you honestly think the apostle Paul would allow a new convert to say to him, “Jesus is not my Lord, but I am saved”?

Now let me see if I can cool down here and be conciliatory. Again, I believe that you are in essence teaching something true: namely, that very often a person is converted without realizing the full implications of the lordship of Christ for their lives.

It is like deciding to join the army and knowing that there will be a commander but not realizing all that he may tell you to do and all the rebellion that still remains in your heart. But that is very different from saying that you can join the army while rejecting the very right of the commander to tell you what to do.

So I agree that discipling is “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Mat 28:19). But I do not agree that Jesus is not the Lord (commander) of true Christians. No one is a Christian who does not, in principle (i.e. even if he does not know all the specifics), bow the knee to Jesus as Lord and say one way or another, I reckon myself dead to sin and alive to God. “Those who belong to Christ (all of them!) have crucified the flesh” (Gal 5:24).

How Do You Preach to Disobedient, Professing Christians?

4. You ask, “Could we dare say that they [the unconcerned, apathetic, stingy, uncommitted professing believers] do not have salvation?”

I believe that our unwillingness to take this possibility seriously is one of the things that makes preaching across our country anemic. If you measure by the preaching of Jesus and by the epistles of Paul the way to preach to disobedient, professing Christians, it means saying things like: “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:21; cf. 1Co 6:9-10). “Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth” (Rev 3:15-16). “Strive to enter by that narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luk 13:24). “If you live according to the flesh, you will die” (Rom 8:13).

The absence of this kind of preaching-with such urgency to professing believers-is one of the weaknesses of the evangelical pulpit. I am puzzled that you are so hesitant to consider that thousands of professing Christians are not saved, when that is what Jesus very strongly suggests was true in his day (Mat 7:13-14) and will be true at the end of the age-our day (Mat 24:12-13).

MacArthur is right when he says that Jesus far more often calls people’s false assurance into question than he tries to give security to any willfully disobedient beginner. And yet we seem to have just the opposite concern. We shrink back from calling anyone’s assurance into question if they are a professing believer. And we shrink back from telling new believers anything about the demands of Jesus that would cause them to wonder if they are really saved. We are not in sync with Jesus or the epistles at this point.

Labor On for the Lord of Glory

Well, I hope that what I have said will help us both to be as biblically effective as possible in the immensely important cause of evangelism and world missions. My great burden is that we know what the evangel is. I think it has been watered down in some presentations to the point where it is not the robust, powerful, life-changing message that I hear in the New Testament.

I hope the lines will be open between us for further conversation. These things are immensely important. There will not be any lasting and deep revival apart from a radical commitment to the full-orbed truth of all that the Bible teaches (Act 20:20, 27).

I praise God for how he has used you in his service. Let nothing I say be heard as diminishing the great way in which God is blessing your life and work. May great grace continue to crown all your labors for the Lord of glory!

Your partner in the Great Work,
John Piper

P.S. Here are the texts I referred to in the letter...

1. Texts That Point to the Necessity of Yielding to Christ as Lord in Order to Inherit Eternal Life

NOTE: None of these texts means that salvation can be earned by works of the law. Salvation is by grace through faith; it does not come from ourselves; it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8). What these texts teach is that the faith which justifies also sanctifies (Act 15:9). All the obedience of believers necessary for final salvation is obedience that comes from faith (1Th 1:3; 2Th 1:11; Gal 5:6; Heb 10:35-36; 11:8). If it does not come from faith, it is legalism and gains nothing but deeper condemnation (Rom 9:32). What is being taught in all these texts is this: "By my works I will show you my faith...faith apart from works is barren...faith apart from works is dead" (Jam 2:18, 20, 26). Salvation is by grace through faith. But saving faith is no fruitless mental assent to gospel facts. These texts point to the truth that the faith that saves is a feeding on Jesus with such satisfaction that we are gradually weaned away from the enslaving addictions to sin (Joh 6:35; Heb 11:24-26).

The Necessity of Doing Good

Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you evildoers.'"

John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of the life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment."

Romans 2:6-10, "For He will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality He will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek."

Galatians 6:9, "And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart."

First Timothy 5:8, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

James 2:17, 26, "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead...For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead."

The Necessity of Obedience

Matthew 7:24-27, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rains fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it has been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rains fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

Matthew 12:48-50, "But Jesus replied to the man who told him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.'"

Luke 13:6-9, "And He told this parable: A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none, and he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I found none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, until I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Luke 8:11-15, "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the Word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the Word receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit is not mature. And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the Word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience."

John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

John 15:2, "Every branch of mine that bears no fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him."

Romans 6: 12, 14, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions...For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

First Corinthians 6:9-10, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor sexual perverts nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor revilers nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God."

Hebrews 5:8-9, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

Hebrews 10:36, "For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised."

First John 2:4, "He who says 'I know Him,' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (See 1 John 3:1-10.)

First John 2:17, "And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

The Necessity of Holiness

Second Thessalonians 2:13, "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the Truth."

Hebrews 12:14, "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

The Necessity to Forgive Others

Matthew 6:12-15, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

NOTE: The eternal significance of this forgiveness in Matthew 6 is made plain in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. Jesus is not merely talking about losing fellowship. He is talking about losing God if we go on through life with an unforgiving spirit.

Matthew 18:32-35, "Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the torturers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

The Necessity Not to Live According to the Flesh

Romans 8:12-14, "So then, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Galatians 5:19-21, "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, haughty spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not enter the Kingdom of God."

Galatians 5:24, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Galatians 6:8, "For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

The Necessity of Being Free from the Love of Money

Luke 14:25-33, "Now great multitudes accompanied Him; and He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple...so therefore whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.'"

Luke 18:18-22, "And the ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother." "' And he said, 'All these I have observed from my youth.' And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me.'"

The Necessity of Love to Christ and God

Matthew 10:37-39, "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

Matthew 24:12-13, "And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved."

John 8:42, "Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God.'"

Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose."

First Corinthians 2:9-10, "As it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him,' God has revealed to us through the Spirit."

First Corinthians 8:3, "But if one loves God, one is known by Him."

First Corinthians 16:22, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed."

Second Thessalonians 2:9-10, "The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish because they refuse to love the truth and so to be saved."

Second Timothy 4:8, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

James 1:12, "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him."

James 2:5, "Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him?"

First Peter 1:8, "Without having seen Him you love Him; though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy."

First Peter 2:7, "To you, therefore, who believe, He is precious."

First John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him."

The Necessity to Love Others

Matthew 25:40-46, "And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then He will say to those at His left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not welcome me; naked and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then He will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Luke 10:25-28, "And behold a lawyer stood up to put Him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law, how do you read?' And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And He said to him, 'You have answered right; do this, and you will live.'"

Galatians 5:6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love."

First Peter 3:9, "Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing."

First John 3:14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we have loved the brethren. He who does not love remains in death."

First John 4:8, 20, "He who does not love does not know God; for God is love...If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

The Necessity to Love the Truth

Second Thessalonians 2:10, "[They] are to perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."

The Necessity of Being Childlike

Matthew 18:2-3, "And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them, and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

The Necessity to Bridle the Tongue

James 1:26, "If any one thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is vain."

The Necessity of Perseverance

Mark 13:13, "You will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."

Luke 9:62, "Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.'"

First Corinthians 15:1-2, "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast-unless you believed in vain."

Colossians 1:21-23, "And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His own death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before Him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel, which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister."

Second Timothy 2:11-12, "This saying is sure: If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us."

Hebrews 3:6, "Christ was faithful over God's house as a Son. And we are His house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope."

Hebrews 3:12-14, "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have shared in Christ, if we hold our first confidence to the end."

Hebrews 6:11-12, "We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Hebrews 10:36, "For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised."

The Necessity of Walking in the Light

First John 1:7, "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

The Necessity of Repentance

Luke 3:3, John the Baptist "went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

Mark 1:14-15, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"

Luke 3:8, "Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children of Abraham."

Luke 5:32, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Luke 13:1-3, "There were some present at that very time who told Him of Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'"

Luke 15:7, "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Luke 24:46-47, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

Acts 2:38, "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Acts 3:19, "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

Acts 5:31, "God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

Acts 11:18, "When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also, God has granted repentance unto life.'"

Acts 20:21, "Testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Necessity of Warfare Vigilance

First Timothy 6:12, "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Luke 13:24, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

Hebrews 3:12-14, "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if we hold our first confidence to the end."

Hebrews 12:14, "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

First Corinthians 9:24-27, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air, but I pommel my body, and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."

Second Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

2. God's Promise of Preservation in Holiness

NOTE: Part of the good news of God's sovereign grace is that this truth enables us to own up to the demands for holiness in the Scripture and yet have assurance of salvation. The key to assurance is not to reduce commands from requirements to options, but rather to magnify grace as a power to obey as well as a pardon for sin. The following passages express the certainty of what God's gracious power will achieve for the child of God.

Mark 13:22, "False christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect."

Luke 22:31-32, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren."

John 10:27-30, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are

Romans 8:30, "And those whom He predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified."

First Corinthians 1:8-9, "He will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Philippians 1:6, "I am sure that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Philippians 2:13, "God is the one who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

First Thessalonians 5:23-24, "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful and He will do it."

Second Timothy 1:12, "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me."

Hebrews 13:20-21, "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

First Peter 1:5, "Who by God's power are guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

3. The Nature of Faith in the Gospel of John

John 3:19-21, "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God."

NOTE: Coming to the Christ is one way John describes faith (Joh 6:35). But no one comes to the light if they hate the light (Joh 3:20). So before there can be the coming of faith, there must be the deeper transformation that brings us to love the light and not hate it. This means that saving faith in John's Gospel is the act of a new heart and not merely the mental assent of an old one that does not love the light. Love is implicit in John's view of saving one. faith. And this is why he says in 1 John that if we don't love, we don't even know God and have not passed from death to life (1Jo 3:14; 4:8, 20).

John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; He who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him."

NOTE: Saving faith implies (and includes) an obedient spirit to the Son of God.

John 4:14, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

NOTE: Saving faith is spoken of here as a drinking of water that satisfies the deepest longings of the soul. This satisfaction is what gives faith its life-changing power. It replaces sin with “the expulsive power of a new affection” (the title of an old sermon by Thomas Chalmers).

John 6:35, “I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

NOTE: This confirms that coming is a way of talking about believing. It also confirms that John 4:14 was talking about faith. It also shows that faith is a feeding and drinking from the presence and promise of Jesus to the degree that we are not dominated by the alluring pleasures of sin (Rom 6:14).

John 5:41-44, “I do not receive glory from men. But I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

NOTE: Faith is impossible for a person who is in love with the praise of men. So faith is of such a nature that it excludes the bondage to applause. It includes a love for God that makes the praise of men pale by comparison to what God is.

John 8:45-47, “But, because I tell you the Truth you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? If I tell you the Truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is because you are not of God.”

NOTE: You cannot even hear the word of God (in a compliant way) if you are not “of God,” that is, not born anew by the free blowing Spirit (Joh 3:8; 1:12-13). Therefore, faith is a fruit of God’s work in the soul and comes from a heart regenerate and drawn to Christ. This is what Jesus means in John 6:44 when he says, “No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.” The drawing enables the coming, which we have seen is faith. The drawing corresponds to being “of God” in John 8:47 and being Jesus’ sheep in John 10:27.

John 10:25-28, “Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me.’”

NOTE: You do not become a sheep by believing. You can believe only because you are a sheep. This is the way Jesus taught the doctrine of election as John records it. The teaching is also found in John 6:44, 65; 8:47; 18:37; 3:8; etc. But the point for faith is that it comes from a certain heart—a heart of a sheep of Jesus which is described like this: My sheep hear my voice...and follow me. Faith therefore must be of such a nature that it produces that following.

John 12:25, “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

NOTE: Hating the life in this world means being willing to suffer in obedience to Jesus’ command of love, just like he suffered for the sake of love. This shows that eternal life cannot be inherited by a faith that is fruitless and leaves the heart loveless and selfish.

John 15:2, “Every branch of mine which bears no fruit, He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it might bear more fruit.”

NOTE: Fruitless faith is not saving faith and results in being cut off from Jesus (like Judas). As verse 6 says, “He is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned.” (Ponder John 13:8-10).

