What's the NT Understanding of Tithing?

I just finished reading your answer to the question concerning the value of the Old Testament for New Testament Christians. How then, do we explain tithing? Does this mean that we are no longer bound to the command to give 1/10? Where in the NT does it give directions concerning tithes and offerings?

Thanks in advance for your guidance and your wisdom!

You ask a very good question and you are essentially correct in your observations. The Old Testament tithe, according to some estimates, actually approximated closer to 23% in total tithes and offerings! The New Testament, however, does not specify a particular percentage that believers are required to give. This being said, however, believers are most certainly encouraged to give (see Rom. 15:26-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:7) and to give generously and liberally (see Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 9:11-13), each according to his own ability (Acts 11:29; 2 Cor. 8:12), with a willing, cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7). Even those who are poor are permitted to give, and praised for doing so (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-5). Paul sets forth Jesus as the believer's example for giving (2 Cor. 8:8-9). We should give out of a heart full of gratitude toward God for what He's done for us through Christ! It is clear, then, that sacrificial giving is very much encouraged (2 Cor. 9:5) – though not commanded (2 Cor. 8:8).

Of course, believers should still be careful who they give to. We must be good stewards of the resources which God has given us, look into different opportunities for giving, and give to those who are above reproach in their financial stewardship (2 Cor. 8:20-21).

Although there are many passages in the New Testament which

address the issue of giving, the most detailed passage on this subject can be found in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

See Also:

- Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "What Does the Bible Say About Tithing?"
- Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "Where Should We Give Our Tithe?"

"What Does the Bible Say About Tithing?"

I enjoyed reading your article on the will of God and I agree with your point of view. I was wondering if in your opinion the Bible is clear about what we should do about Tithing?

I do not believe we are under the tithe obligation (10%) anymore. But this doesn't mean we aren't obligated to give. In fact, it might be that we should give *more!* I believe our responsibility is greater under the New Testament because now we don't have a simple figure (or percentage) given that we can follow, but rather must consider what the needs are around us and give accordingly. The model in giving, of course, was God the Father in giving His Son for us, and who continues to give to us bountifully. Jesus was pleased with the old woman who gave only a little bit because it was all she had: giving was the important thing to her, taking care of the work of God

rather than worrying about her own needs (Mk. 12:41ff). He also taught us not to fret about our personal needs but to lay up treasure in heaven (Mt. 6:19-21, 31-34). If we do what we are convinced is right, even if it costs us dearly, our Father in heaven will reward us in due time (Lk.6:38). Paul called on us to be cheerful givers, to look out for others ahead of ourselves. If all of us have that attitude, then we will find ourselves helping others and being helped in return (2 Cor. 3:13-15). He taught us to give bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6), but he taught us to give as we have purposed in our hearts, not under compulsion. And he promised God's provision for us (vv. 8-11).

A key issue in the matter of giving is fear. Do we see a need and not give out of fear? Do we out of insecurity or greed hold onto our material things or horde our wealth to obtain more so we can buy more things or be secure if the economy takes a slide?

Another key matter is the ongoing ministries of the church. Are we behind our church leaders? Do we support them with our time, energies, gifts, and money? What about the work of Christ around the world? Are we giving so others can go and proclaim the Gospel?

We need to get away from the law mindset on this matter. Our minds and hearts should be focused on our church and the world around us, and we should be ready to give to help others and further the kingdom, even if we do without. We must have an eternal perspective; this world and its "goodies" are not what are important. The work of the kingdom of Christ should provide the focus and measure for everything we do and have.

I cannot tell you how much you should give. If your greatest desire is to further the kingdom of Christ, and everything you have is at His disposal, then the balance will be tipped toward giving. Imagine what the church could do if we all had the attitude of the Israelites when it came time to build the

tabernacle! (Ex. 35:5ff)

Rick Wade
Probe Ministries

See Also:
- Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "What's the NT Understanding of Tithing?"
- Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "Where Should We Give Our Tithe?"

"What About the Apocrypha?"

The Catholic institution claims the apocrypha is inspired. Protestants don't. Therefore, within the Body, there are two different lists of supposedly God-inspired authoritative Scripture.

So… How can we claim the Bible is authoritative when there are two differing lists of supposed Scriptures within Christianity…Two different Bibles? My next question is akin to the first: How do we know with certainty which list is THE list?" Both of these questions center on authority. Who do we trust as our God approved authority able to testify for us on behalf of Scriptures?

It is no wonder that the other religions of the world do not take true Christianity seriously when such fundamental divisions exist within the Body.

The Apocrypha is not included as part of the inspired text because it does not meet the criteria of the inspired canon. Here are just a few examples.

The Apocrypha contains historical errors. In Judith 1:1

Nebuchadnezzar is reigning in Ninevah instead of Babylon.

The Apocrypha contains unbiblical teaching. 2 Maccabees 12 teaches to pray for the dead. Tobit 12:9 teaches faith by works, a clear contradiction to the Bible (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Jesus and the Apostles do not quote the Apocrypha. We do not see it directly quoted in the New Testament.

Finally Jesus tells us where the inspired canon ends in Luke 11:51. He says the prophets extend from Abel (Genesis 4) to Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20-21). So the line of prophets ends with the Jewish Old Testament, the Masoretic text that Jesus used as authoritative.

The history of the Apocrypha is interesting. It was not part of the Catholic Church's inspired canon until 1545 AD. No council recognized it in the first four centuries. The historical evidence goes against the Apocrypha. It was incorporated by the Catholic Church in response to the Protestant challenge to several unbiblical teachings such as praying for the dead and penance. Hope this helps.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

"Jesus Contributed to Drunkenness!"

I know drunkenness is condemned in Scripture, yet it seems that Jesus contributed to the drunkeness at the wedding feast when he turned the water to wine.

I'm afraid we can't agree with your conclusions. First of all, Scripture doesn't say anything about drunkenness occurring at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11). Secondly, to blame the Lord Jesus for drunkenness by changing water into wine is like blaming God for the Great Chicago Fire because He created wood with the capacity to burn. No one is responsible for drunkenness except the person who chooses to overdrink. I think it's important to draw a distinction between the fact that God created good things in the first place, and the possibility that those good things can be abused. He is never responsible for our sinful choices.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Did the Early Church Fathers Accept the Apocrypha?"

I have been searching for some time to find quotes from the earliest church fathers (first through fourth centuries) that will demonstrate that they did not accept the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha (presently accepted by the Roman Catholic Church) as scripture. Do such evidences exist? Where might I find them? What was accepted as authoritative Old Testament scripture in the time of Jesus? Did certain copies of the Septuigint include the Apocrypha? Thank you for your assistance.

Let me try to answer your questions in order:

Do such evidences exist? Where might I find them?

F. F. Bruce uses extensive quotes from the early church

fathers in both chapters five and six of his book *The Canon of Scripture* (InterVarsity Press, 1988). Chapter five includes church fathers in the east (Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Origen and Athanasius, etc), while chapter six looks at the Latin west (Tertullian, Jerome and Augustine). The record is mixed; some accepted the apocryphal books with qualifications, others were more critical. Few accept them outright.

What was accepted as authoritative Old Testament scripture in the time of Jesus?

Both the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament were authoritative in Jesus' time. Bruce argues that Jesus read from and used the Hebrew version while Stephen, a Hellenist, would have used the Septuagint.

Did certain copies of the Septuagint include the Apocrypha?

The earliest extant copies we have of the Septuagint come from the Christian era (5th and 6th centuries). Although they include the apocryphal books, Bruce argues that there is no evidence of a wider canon for the Alexandrian of Greek Jews than was accepted by the Palestinian Jews. In fact, Philo (20 B.C – 50 A.D.) a Hellenistic Jew, does not mention the apocryphal additions.

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

"Did Jesus Cleanse the Temple More than Once, Or Is There a

Mistake in the Bible?”

In John 2:13-25 is the story of when Jesus cleansed the temple. It immediately follows Jesus turning the water into wine, and immediately precedes the conversation with Nicodemus. In Matthew 21:12-16 is the same story immediately precedes the cursing of the barren fig tree. In Mark 11:15-18 the cleansing of the temple takes place immediately after the cursing of the fig tree.

Now, as I see it, there are only three possibilities.

1) The text in either Matthew and Mark or in John is in error about the time of the cleansing of the temple. And either the text in Matthew or Mark is wrong about the time of the cursing of the fig tree.

2) The gospels were not written in chronological order.

3) The same incident happened more than once (highly unlikely).

What is your take on this? Did I overlook something?

Thanks for your question! You have raised an important (and relatively common) difficulty in interpreting the gospels. Let me first say that the gospels were not necessarily written in chronological order. In fact, it is generally accepted that many of the incidents recorded in the gospels were NOT written in chronological order. As a general rule, the only exception to this is Luke’s gospel, in which he specifically states his intention “to write it out…in consecutive order” (Luke 1:3).

A good book which you may want to consult about some of these issues of gospel interpretation and harmonization is Craig Blomberg’s *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1987). Since this is not an area of personal expertise for me, I will simply give you Blomberg’s

observations on possible ways in which the difficulties you have noticed might be resolved.

Concerning the cursing of the fig tree, Blomberg believes that Matthew has simply telescoped the events of two days "into one uninterrupted paragraph which seems to refer only to the second day's events." He points out that Matthew's introduction, "Now in the morning," does "not specify which day is in view, and there is no reason to exclude an interval of time between verses 19 and 20." He continues by noting, "Mark does not deny that the fig tree withered immediately, only that the disciples did not see it until the next day." He concludes by pointing out that the gospels leave out a wealth of detail (indeed, John states this explicitly in 20:30), and such omissions simply become more evident when compared with a more detailed account in another gospel.

Blomberg offers a couple of solutions to the problem of the cleansing of the temple. The first solution holds that John has simply woven this incident into his gospel thematically, rather than chronologically. In other words, there is only one cleansing and John, for thematic considerations, has simply chosen to relay this incident in a manner unrelated to its actual chronological occurrence in the life of Christ. He offers a couple of reasons in support of this view. The second solution (which commends itself to my mind) actually acknowledges two separate cleansings, one at the beginning and one near the end of Jesus' public ministry. He offers six arguments in support of this second position:

1. The details of the cleansing given in John's account are completely different from those given in the Synoptics (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke).

2. If Jesus felt strongly enough about the temple corruption to cleanse it once at the beginning of His ministry, it is not really too difficult to believe that He might do it again at the end of His ministry.

3. Since cleansing the temple was an overtly Messianic act, about which some of the Jews would have approved, it is not surprising that He could get away with doing this once at the outset of His ministry. However, when the Jews began to realize that Jesus was not really the sort of Messiah they were looking for, a second cleansing would have almost certainly sealed His fate (see Mark 11:18).

4. In the Synoptics, Jesus is accused of having said that He would destroy the temple and rebuild another in three days not made with human hands (Mark 14:58). But a similar comment by Jesus is only explicitly mentioned in John 2:19. Furthermore, since the witnesses in Mark's gospel get the statement slightly wrong, and cannot agree among themselves (Mark 14:59), it may be a confused memory of something Jesus said two or three years earlier, rather than just a few days earlier.

5. Jesus' statement in the Synoptics is more severe than that in John. Only in the Synoptics does He refer to the Gentiles' need to pray at the temple, and only in the Synoptics does He refer to the Jews as "robbers".

6. In John 2:20 the Jews refer to the temple rebuilding project having begun 46 years earlier. This would mark the date of the cleansing at around AD 27 or 28. But Jesus was almost certainly not crucified until at least AD 30. And it is most unlikely that John would have simply made up such a figure. Therefore, it is quite likely that John is describing a distinct (and earlier) cleansing from the one mentioned in the Synoptics.

When I approach the gospel narratives with the attitude that they are innocent until proven guilty, keeping in mind that they have been thoroughly demonstrated to be generally reliable historical sources, the six arguments listed above strongly incline me to the view that there were in fact two temple cleansings in the life of Christ—one at the beginning

of His public ministry, the other at its conclusion. At any rate, that is my take on this particular issue.

Hope this helps!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“I Think One of My Students Plagiarized Your Angel Article!”

I am an English teacher checking research papers and I have a wonderful one on angels. It talks about Sue Bohlin dropping her baby boy and him almost hitting the wall. It goes on to say angels are non-bodily creatures in which their response to God’s love did not need time nor reflection to grow and mature.

Trouble is, I don’t think this girl has ever used the word “nor” or “non-bodily”… I really don’t think she wrote it. Does anything here sound familiar? It also talks about Myra and the ministry of Teen Challenge in Philadelphia…it quotes Shakespeare and Isaac Watts.

I imagine you are busy, but I would like this girl to write her own paper, not use someone else’s works. I appreciate your time!

Response #1:

Boy, what an interesting e-mail! Your student produced a paper with some interesting concepts that are new and intriguing to me, as well as some anecdotes that I did indeed write. Check out my article on angels here.

Now maybe I'll do an AltaVista search to find the other source article that talks about the "non-bodily" (huh?) creatures. . . <smile>

So let me know how this plays out, will you?

Sue (another teacher)
Response #2:
As soon as I sent my other e-mail, I found the web page your student lifted from:

http://geocities.com/Heartland/Pointe/4290/angels.html

Oh, they think we are so dumb and they are so crafty!!

Sue

You should have seen the look on this girl when I told her I had e-mailed the author of her paper!!! You should see the paranoid look on all of these kids when I tell them I caught someone plagiarizing and e-mailed the author!!!

This little girl has to have her paper rewritten by Monday and she will e-mail you an apology then. Thanks for the help. Much of her paper came directly from your "Angels: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly" (which, by the way, was an interesting paper!)

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP! It made my day!!

“Do Angels Have Free Will?”

Do angels have Free Will like humans, or are they just automatons?
Yes, angels have free will like us. When Satan chose to stop obeying and worshipping God, and vaunted his own pride, that was a free choice, with the consequences that followed. One third of the angels chose to follow him. (See Rev. 12:4)

What sets apart angels from us is that we can be forgiven and restored, and they can’t. To follow God or not was a one-shot deal for angels, as far as we can tell. 1 Peter 1:12 says that angels “long to look into these things” (salvation and grace), which are not available to them.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Bad Things Are Happening After I Talked to My Angel”

I’m hoping you can help me. A couple of weeks ago, a friend told me that there was a way to talk to my guardian angel by going into a relaxed, meditative state, and asking “Are you there?”

I didn’t believe it would work, but I tried it anyway. Nothing happened, but that night, I was having a strange dream when I was “awakened” by a loud knock at my door. I sat up in my bed and went to ask “who’s there?” and nothing would come out of my mouth but a hoarse whisper. I was still dreaming. Then I

really woke up and my heart was pounding and then it felt like my bed was slightly trembling. That was on a Tuesday at 12:57am. The following Tuesday, I awoke at the same exact time to tapping on the wall next to my head. Again, it felt as though my bed was trembling. I didn't sleep that night and convinced myself that it was just my heart pounding that caused it. Then it happened 2 more times, once on a tuesday a half an hour earlier, and then on a friday. I tried looking at it logically the last time it happened. I felt the walls, the floor and the only thing that was shaking was my mattress. The heater is on the other side of my room.

My manager told me to stop burning incense in my room and maybe that would help. I stopped burning it for the past week and nothing has happened. I am scared though, especially after reading the web page on angels and demons in disguise. Please write back to me. If you can advise me, I would greatly appreciate it, and maybe be able to sleep with my light off for once.

You must be terrified! I am so sorry to hear about this series of events. From what you write, I conclude that you really are dealing with demons—and they are terrorizing you. This is where you inadvertently opened the door to them:

> *A couple of weeks ago, a friend told me that there was a way to talk to my guardian angel by going into a relaxed, meditative state, and asking "are you there?" I didn't believe it would work, but I tried it anyway. Nothing happened.*

Actually, something DID happen. Your friend gave you very bad, very dangerous advice. The Bible gives us no instruction or allowance for contacting angels; when you opened yourself up to your "angel," it was an unholy angel who answered.

Jesus Christ is the only One who has power enough to make the terrorizing stop. The demons are afraid of Him and afraid of

His blood. I suggest you pray a prayer entrusting yourself to Him as God's Son who loved you enough to die (shed His blood) for you. Then, address the demons out loud by telling them they have to leave in Jesus' name. You can also say, "I am protected by the blood of Jesus Christ."

Here's the deal, though. If you haven't trusted Christ to save you, from either your sins or this situation, you have no authority to use Jesus' name and there will be no power behind your words. The words are not magic; the power is in a true relationship with Jesus, where He protects you because you have entrusted yourself to Him.

If you have never trusted Christ as your savior, please read here for a full explanation of what it means: The Most Important Decision of Your Life.

Let me know how you're doing, OK?

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

"Salvation Is By Grace, But We Have to Do Our Part"

Sue,

Thank you for being one who stands up for the principles that our Savior Jesus Christ taught. I applaud your efforts. I have a couple of questions from your article:

I read your "A Short Look at Six World Religions" and it said that many of Joseph Smith's prophecies never came true. Which

prophecies are those?

I also read, "Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God's grace." I have been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 8 years of age, and I have always been taught that we are saved by the grace of God. However, salvation is not free. For example, if one chooses to not live the commandments that God has given, then how can he be worthy to live in the presence of God? Here is a quote from the Book of Mormon: "For we know that it is by grace that we are saved after all that we can do." (page 99-100). Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins, but we must do our part to accept his atonement and live his commandments. Accepting his atonement is not enough. Through the grace of our loving Savior we can be redeemed from our sins and return to the presence of our Heavenly Father clean from all sin, again if we keep his commandments the best we know how. God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are the perfect examples of mercy.

Have a good day and thank you for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is my best friend.

Hello _____,

Jesus is my best friend too! <smile>

> *I read your article "A Short Look at Six World Religions" and it said that many of Joseph Smith's prophecies never came true. Which prophecies are those?*

I cited a few of them in another response to an e-mail about my article. Your question prompted me to add a link to that article at the end of the one you read, but here's a direct link for you..

> *I also read, "Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God's grace." I have been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 8 years of age, and I have always been taught that we are saved by the grace*

> *of God. However, salvation is not free.*

I would agree that salvation was not free for God, for whom it cost Him EVERYTHING. But it *is* a free gift for us. Please note Ephesians 2:8,9:

> "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."

This scripture is diametrically opposed to Mormon doctrine. We cannot do anything to contribute to our salvation. Isaiah 64:6 says that all our righteousness is as filthy rags; what can we possibly give to God that will overcome the heinous sin of requiring the death of His Son to be reconciled to Him? If someone came in here and murdered one of my sons and then said, "Hey, I don't want you to be mad at me. . . let me do something to help me get myself in your good graces. Here's a nickel. . ." —Well, guess what? That wouldn't work! And it doesn't work with God either.

The question of obeying His commandments is a separate issue. Obedience for the person who has put his trust in Christ is a matter of bearing fruit and walking out the new kind of life (new heart, new motivation, new source of power) that Christ brings at the point of salvation. Obedience for the person who has NOT put his trust in Christ, but is trusting in himself to earn heaven on his own merit, counts for nothing because Jesus said, "Apart from Me, no one comes to the Father" (John 14:6). It would be like that person who murdered my sons saying, "But I'm keeping all the Bohlin family rules! I'm respectful to the parents, I take out the garbage on garbage day, I put my dishes in the dishwasher, I don't let the dog sleep on the bed! I deserve to be a member of your family!" See how that doesn't work either?

_____, I pray the Lord will open your eyes to see that trying to earn salvation with our paltry efforts—even WITH His

grace—is a slap in the face of our God. He wants us to come to Him with empty hands and the realization that we do not deserve and cannot earn the gift of eternal life that comes ONLY through trusting in the Lord Jesus.

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

It occurred to me as I read your response that we aren't exactly talking about the same definition of "salvation." How exactly do you define it, in the strict sense? By that I mean, tell me what salvation is and what it is not, as you perceive it.

I am really impressed that you realize we're defining our terms differently. I want to make sure you get the best possible answer, so I'm going to ask my Probe colleague Michael Gleghorn, who has formal theological training, to answer that question, OK?

Michael Gleghorn's answer:

Hello _____,

Thanks for your e-mail. You ask a very important question. Indeed, entire books have been written on the subject. I will simply offer a broad sketch of some of the fundamentals of this important biblical doctrine.

In its broadest sense, the biblical doctrine of salvation is concerned with the idea of God's deliverance of His people from harm or danger. In the Old Testament, God's greatest saving act occurred when He delivered (or saved) His people Israel from their slavery in Egypt. This event is known as the Exodus. Thus, the biblical doctrine of salvation includes more than just "spiritual" deliverance, it can incorporate physical deliverance as well. The important point is that salvation, in the biblical sense, is ALWAYS THE WORK OF GOD—NOT MAN. Just

listen to God's word to the prophet Isaiah: "I, even I, am the Lord; and there is no savior besides Me." (43:11).

This point cannot be emphasized enough—God is the One who saves. Even in the book of Judges, when Israel has many human "deliverers," it is God who appoints them and raises them up for their specific task. Thus, we repeatedly read statements such as the following in the book of Judges: "And when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, THE LORD RAISED UP A DELIVERER for the sons of Israel TO DELIVER THEM" (3:9; emphasis mine).

And the psalmist also wrote: "Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, the God who is our salvation. God is to us a God of deliverances; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (68:19-20). You get the idea.

The Old Testament Scriptures provide much of the "theological context" for the New Testament doctrine of God and salvation. While some things are certainly "new" and different (see John 1:17, etc.), much remains the same. In particular, salvation is still viewed as THE WORK OF GOD—NOT MAN. Think back to the end of Psalm 68:20: "to God the Lord belong escapes from death." Now listen to Paul in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, BUT THE FREE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD" (emphasis mine).

In the New Testament, as in the Old, God is the only true savior of man. This salvation has been made available through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS according to the Scriptures" (emphasis mine). Furthermore, Christ is the ONLY way of salvation. As Peter said in Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is NO OTHER NAME under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (emphasis mine).

Of course, if God is the ONLY savior and, as Jesus Himself said, “No one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6), clearly Jesus must be God. This is the teaching of the New Testament (see John 1:1-3, 14). It’s important to point out, however, that Jesus is NOT God the Father; He is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. Of course Jesus is also a Man. (Although I cannot get into it right now, Mormons and Christians not only have a different understanding of the doctrine of salvation, we also have radically different conceptions of God. Pat Zukeran, a colleague of mine at Probe, has recently written an article on “The Mormon Doctrine of God.”

The Bible claims that Jesus is the only savior, who died on the cross for our sins. But Christ’s death is not merely a means of salvation from sin (as great as that would be in itself), it also makes available to man the perfect righteousness of God! Thus we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Salvation not only includes the forgiveness of our debt of sin, it also includes the crediting of Christ’s righteousness to our account! In other words, Christ washes away the stain of our sin and clothes us in His perfect righteousness. Luther called this “The Great Exchange.”

But how does this Great Exchange take place? By what means does it occur? What must one do to be saved? That was the question asked of Paul and Silas by the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30. Paul and Silas responded by saying, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved” (16:31). In other words, the jailer was told to BELIEVE (i.e. put his faith or trust) in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gift of salvation, like all gifts, must be received. It is received by faith alone. It is with this understanding that we must read Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that NOT OF YOURSELVES, it is the gift of

God; NOT AS A RESULT OF WORKS, that no one should boast" (emphasis mine). And again, in Titus 3:4-7 we read: "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, NOT ON THE BASIS OF DEEDS WHICH WE HAVE DONE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (emphasis mine). Other aspects of salvation include, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO, justification (i.e. being declared righteous by God), adoption into God's family as His beloved children (Galatians 4:4-7), the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14), and the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23). Man receives all that is included in God's gift of salvation BY FAITH ALONE—PLUS NOTHING!

But do works play no role at all in the doctrine of salvation? Actually, they do! HOWEVER, WORKS ARE NOT A MEANS OF SALVATION! Rather, good works are a RESULT of salvation. Salvation is a gift of God, received by faith alone—plus nothing! But one of the RESULTS of a genuine salvation experience is that the believer engages in good works. We recently looked at Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:4-7. But what comes after these verses? In Ephesians 2:10 we read: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Notice the progression of ideas in Ephesians 2:8-10. We are saved by grace through faith and not by our works. However, we were saved, in part, FOR good works! I'll let you look at Titus 3:8 on your own, but the same order of ideas is present there as well.

By the way, this is James' point as well in James 2:14-26. Some people think that this passage in James contradicts Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace, through faith—plus nothing. But if we read this passage carefully, it is clear

that James is not arguing that we are saved by works. Rather, he is making the very important point that GENUINE faith produces good works. Thus, if no good works are evident, it may be because the alleged faith is not genuine. And of course no one is claiming that a "pseudo-faith" can save; the faith that saves is GENUINE faith—and such faith leads inevitably to good works.

Two final points. First, we are not capable of judging the thoughts and intentions of others. Only God can do that. If someone does not appear TO ME to be engaging in good works, this is no proof that they are not truly saved. Only God knows their heart. However, it might be appropriate to ask that person to examine himself to see whether his faith is really genuine or not (see 2 Corinthians 13:5 for instance). Second, even the good works resulting from the genuine faith of a true believer are not really his own (in the sense that they originate and are carried out solely in his own strength). They also are the gift of God and can only be properly carried out in the power of God's Spirit—NOT in the strength of the believer's flesh! Although many verses could be quoted to this effect, I will mention only two, Romans 8:3-4: "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, GOD DID: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (emphasis mine).

Please allow me to summarize the main points:

- Salvation is the work of God—not man.
- God offers man salvation as a free gift, based on the substitutionary death of His Son for our sins.
- Salvation includes, but is not limited to, such things as the forgiveness of sins, the crediting of Christ's

righteousness to our account, justification (being declared righteous by God), adoption into God's family as His beloved children, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of eternal life.

• Man receives God's salvation by faith alone—plus nothing.

• The object of our faith is the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

• Good works do not merit salvation, but genuine salvation results in good works.

• Good works are only "good" to the extent that they are done in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God Himself is ultimately the Author even of the good works which follow a genuine salvation experience.

I hope this helps. I also hope it makes sense. These ideas are some of the most essential elements of the biblical doctrine of salvation; they do not, of course, exhaust the subject. If the Bible is the word of God, we must pay very careful attention to the means by which God has made His salvation available to us—neither adding to it, nor subtracting from it, but teaching it just as God revealed it to us.

Shalom,

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