

THE ALLEGED WORKS SALVATION SCRIPTURES

By Denver Cheddie

It is the unequivocal teaching of scriptures like Eph. 2:8,9 and Rom. 6:23 that salvation is a gift which is not contingent on good works or human effort. Good works performed after salvation determines our reward in heaven, not our eventual presence there. Holiness is necessary to maintain ***personal fellowship*** with God but a lack thereof does not alter our ***saving relationship*** with God, otherwise the question arises as to how much holiness is needed, or how much un-holiness is tolerable, whereby defeating the purpose of grace. No one is perfect and as far as the Bible is concerned one act of un-holiness renders one unholy. On the other hand, a clearly unregenerate life may indicate an absence of genuine salvation in the first place.

In this article, we scrutinize the scriptures which appear to teach salvation by good works, which are rapaciously latched upon by cults to substantiate their heresies, and we will demonstrate that when they do that, they stand on a shaky ground.

Repentance

Is repentance necessary for salvation? Some make salvation contingent on a complete turning away from sin which they claim is the meaning of repentance. This is far from the truth.

Repentance (*metavnoia*) is from two Greek words "after" (*metav*) and "thought" (*nou*). An afterthought usually involves a change of mind. The context in which the word is used indicates the subject about which one must change [one's] mind. In Hebrews 6:1, it is repentance from dead works. In Acts 20:21, it is repentance concerning God. In Acts 2:38, Peter urged his listeners to change their minds about themselves and about who Christ is. The Bible does require repentance for salvation, but repentance does not mean to change all one's conduct as a condition for receiving salvation. Changing one's conduct is the fruit of repentance. Biblical repentance is a change of mind or attitude concerning either God, Christ, dead works, or sin... Repentance occurs at the moment one turns to Christ in faith. It is simultaneous with faith, not separate from it. Repentance is not a separate "work" or condition for salvation. When a person turns in faith to Christ, he simultaneously is changing his mind about himself and Christ and is turning from sin.*

Denying Oneself – Luke 9:23 and others

As a condition for following Jesus, disciples must deny themselves and carry the cross. It is superficial for 21st century Westerners to cite this scripture in support of works salvation. They actually think that denying oneself means to give up bad habits and selfish desires as prerequisites for salvation or maintaining it. The early believers were best positioned to understand this passage. Back when Christianity was against the law, becoming a Christian

oftentimes meant losing one's life – literally. Far from being a requirement for salvation, Jesus was anticipating what would transpire after someone believed, and giving them advance notice. Essentially He was telling them what they needed to brace themselves for.

Furthermore, there is a difference between being a disciple and being a believer. In John 6:66, some of Jesus' disciples followed him no more. Judas was a disciple who was included in the apostles' promise of Matt. 19:28, but himself was not a believer. Being a believer is what is necessary for salvation. It is optional, though advisable, for a believer to become a disciple (Rom. 12:1,2).

Striving to Enter – Luke 13:24

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

The context of this passage lays stress not on the effort we must make to enter but the timing. The focus is not on the making of the effort but making it before the owner of the house closes the door. "Ensure that you enter in before it's too late".

Obedying the Gospel – Heb. 5:9; Eph 2:2; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17

Here salvation is provided for those who obey Jesus. Again reading from a distant hindsight, we are tempted to interpret it in terms of our current usage of terminology. Does obeying the gospel mean obeying Christ's every command? In fact it is speaking of obedience to the command to believe in

Jesus. It is not the obedience resulting from salvation but the obedience which is equivalent to believing. The term "those who obey the gospel" is used synonymously with believers, as the above scriptures clearly indicate. Likewise "those who obey not the gospel" are the unsaved, not a defiant faction of the church.

The Righteous are Barely Saved – 1 Pet. 4:18

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

Words like "righteous", "saved" etc must be interpreted in context, for they have various meanings throughout scripture. This passage teaches that the righteous are barely saved with a possible implication that those who do not come up to scratch will eventually be lost. This is the last thing Peter intended. He was quoting from the Septuagint's (Greek version of the OT) translation of Proverbs 11:31. The Hebrew OT renders the verse "*If the righteous receive recompense on earth, how much more the ungodly or sinner*". This must be viewed as identical in meaning to the Septuagint's "*If the righteous are barely saved...*" This scripture is talking about believers receiving their recompense on earth. In context, that reward is the suffering associated with being in Christ. Paraphrased, it may be rendered "If even believers go through such a hard time now, imagine what it would eventually be like for unbelievers". This fits perfectly into the context of 1 Peter 4 where the apostle was relating the earthly suffering of believers to the judgment that must begin in the house of God - and end with unbelievers.

1 Corinthians 9:27

But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

In the KJV, Paul leaves open the possibility that after preaching to others he himself might become a "castaway". Some interpret that word to mean that Paul could have lost his salvation and ended up going to hell. This is very unlikely given the context in which the passage was written. Paul started off talking about his rights as an apostle, but from verse 15 he explained that he never claimed those rights because he wanted a full reward in heaven (vs 18). Therefore he preached the gospel for free so that his reward would not be from man. From verse 24 he started talking about the prize associated with the work he was doing. Salvation is never considered a prize, but a gift. A prize is something you earn. Interestingly in the NIV, "castaway" in verse 27 is translated "disqualified from the prize". The thing that Paul strove so hard for was not to maintain his salvation, but to obtain a full reward in heaven.

Making Jesus Lord

"Confessing the Lord Jesus" (Romans 10:9, KJV) has led some to believe that one must make Jesus Lord and hence obey all his commands as necessary for maintaining salvation. For a Jewish person, confessing Jesus as Lord was equivalent to repudiating Judaism and embracing Christianity. The same idea is present in Acts 2:38 where Peter seems to make baptism precede salvation. For a Jewish person, baptism in the name of Jesus was a clear renunciation of his old antichristian religion. When viewed this way, there is no gap in meaning between being baptized in Jesus' name, and in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; and no inkling of Lordship salvation.

James

When James speaks of works he speaks of works resulting from salvation, an absence of which would place a question mark on the presence of faith. The example he gives is Abraham's sacrificing of Isaac. It would have been useless for Abraham to have faith that God would raise up Isaac from the dead after he killed him (Heb. 11:19) without acting on the command to kill him (James 2:21). Similarly certain actions are always concomitant with true faith. But this is not a requirement for salvation, rather the result of it. James was speaking of good works resulting from salvation, Paul spoke of dead works which were unable to bring about salvation.

John 5:28,29

28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation

Taken by itself, these verses appear to teach that the good go to heaven and the bad to hell. But just a few verse earlier (vs. 24) Jesus defined what he meant by good – hearing his word and believing. Those good people who hear and believe Jesus will not be condemned.

Being Led by the Spirit

Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Does being led by the Spirit mean that if the Holy Spirit tells us to give \$1M to a tele-evangelist, we must obey? If it does then that kind of obedience becomes necessary for salvation according to Rom. 8:14. However a closer look at Rom. 8 suggests otherwise. We must be careful not to read more than is warranted into the expressions Paul used. In context Paul was demarcating 2 groups of people – believers and unbelievers.

In vs. 1 those “in Christ” are further qualified as “walking not after the flesh but the Spirit.” Paul was not presenting two categories of believers – fleshly and spiritual – as the context would readily reveal. The entire build up to Romans 8 is one contrasting believers and unbelievers, not levels of “spiritual growth”. Verses 4-8 further elaborate on that, and verse 9 crowns it off: “You [his audience of believers, who have the Holy Spirit living in them] are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit”. In verses 13-17, Paul adds new terms to the list, which he uses to describe believers. Believers are referred to as those “not living in the flesh”, “mortifying the deeds of the body”, “having the Spirit of adoption” and “being led by the Spirit”. To interpret these as being anything other than synonyms of “being in Christ” is to make a complete mockery, not only of Paul's linguistic diversity, but also of the context of the entire book of Romans, where Paul seeks to present salvation by grace.

Luke 6:46; Matt. 7:21

Luke 6:46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Matthew 7:21 ¶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not

prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Why do you call me Lord and not do what I say? What exactly did Jesus say to do? A similar question was asked in John 6:28 - *How do we work the works of God?* The answer in the next verse was simply to believe on the One God sent i.e. Jesus. Not all who say "Lord, Lord" are saved, only those who do the will of God. To modern readers the will of God is some outlined plan of their life that was ordained before the foundation of the world. To some of them fulfilling that purpose is necessary for heaven. I pity them. That definition may be correct in another context, but in Matt. 7:21 the will of God is equivalent to believing in Christ and knowing Him. In verse 23, those who professed to be Christians were rejected not because they did not fulfill some pre-ordained mandate, but because they were not "known" by Jesus. The will of God, in this context, is to believe in Christ.

1 John

Chapter 2:

3 ¶ And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. 6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Chapter 3:

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. 23 ¶ And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. 24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

In 2:3-6 it clearly states that obeying his commands is necessary to know God therefore keeping the 10 Commandments is necessary for salvation. A superficial reading may lead to this conclusion. In 3:22-24, it tells us exactly which commands John is referring to. His command is to believe and love

one another. Give this scripture to any cultist who insists on "keeping the commandments" (**1 John 3:22-24**). This is the command we must obey. God never commands us to obey the 10 Commandments. The command we must obey to be saved is the command to believe in Jesus. Surely this is not burdensome. The law of the OT was a bondage that could not save (Gal. 4:25,26; 5:1).

The same argument holds for John 15:10.

2 Peter 1:9

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

In the first 9 verses Peter listed a number of qualities that should characterize us as Christians. But in verse 9 he asserted that deficiencies in this regard did not indicate a loss or lack of salvation, but shortsightedness, evidence that one has forgotten that one was purified of one's sins. A deficiency in Christian virtues may indicate spiritual immaturity or neglect on the part of the believer, not necessarily an absence or loss of salvation.

Matt. 5:17-19

17 ¶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. 19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

This verse is used by many law keeping cults to prove that Jesus did not really abolish the law hence it is still binding on NT believers today. Let us look at it carefully. In vs. 17 he makes it clear he did not come to abolish the

law, but to fulfill it. In verse 18, he did not say the law would never pass away, but that it would not pass away until all is fulfilled. But didn't Jesus fulfill it? He kept the Law perfectly, met all the requirements and was thus qualified to pay the penalty of the law on our behalf. Simple? 2 Cor. 3:3-11 clearly teaches that the 10 Commandments are no longer binding on believers (this was the only aspect of the law written on stone). 9 of the 10 are repeated in the NT as instructions in righteousness, not as legal requirements, the exception being of course the 4th one concerning the Sabbath.

In verse 19, those who break the commands are considered the least in the kingdom. What's interesting is that they are not denied access to the kingdom, which is exactly my thesis. Sinful acts do not rob a believer of salvation, only a portion of his eternal reward. In Romans 6:1 Paul anticipated that his teaching on grace naturally would lead to the question "Shall we sin that grace will abound?" If sin did affect our salvation, Paul missed a really good opportunity to say so. Instead he appealed to our reason, to not sin.

Rich young ruler

In Matt. 19:17-19 Jesus tells the young man that eternal life comes by keeping the commandments. Technically this is not incorrect. Anyone who can perfectly keep the law cannot be accused of being a lawbreaker (James 2:10). The problem is that no one can do that (Rom 3:23). Sinful human nature militates against it. The young ruler thought otherwise. To prove him wrong, Jesus challenged him to prove that he really loved his neighbor by

giving all his riches to the poor. At this point he was supposed to recognize his depravity "I really am not a perfect Law keeper!", but he trusted in his riches (Mk. 10:24). This scripture does not explicitly teach salvation by grace, but nothing in it contradicts this crucial doctrine. Jesus' conversation with the young man was not meant to be didactic. The fact that Jesus was daring him to do something he knew he couldn't is clear from the tone of the passage.

Holiness – Hebrews 12:14

Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

This verse appears to make seeing God contingent on being holy. Being holy is absolutely necessary for spending eternity with God, I agree. But what does holiness mean in this context? Does it mean being morally cleansed from sin or ceremonially separated unto God? Holiness can mean both. In the context of Hebrews I believe it means the latter. This epistle was written because of a crisis taking place among Jewish believers. Many of them, under persecution from their former Judaist colleagues, were apostatizing. The problem with them was not one of moral uncleanness, but a tendency to draw back from God at the first sign of trouble.

This is further substantiated by the use of the OT clause "**Be ye holy**" which carries the connotation of ceremonial separation (see **Lev. 20:26** cf. 11:44,45; Num. 6:5). The entire book of **Leviticus**, in which the clause is proliferated, speaks of holiness in the context of being separated unto God. Any act that impinges on that separation is considered unholy. For example worshipping idols was considered unholy (19:2-4). It was unholy for a priest

to cut his body (21:5,6). Why? Because the other nations did that. Anything that belonged to God was holy (19:24), and objects were called unclean or accursed because they belonged to other nations.

The word "holiness" is used by Paul to describe the path of life called Christianity. Without this holiness, where one is separated from the world unto God (saved), one can never see God (spend eternity with Him).

Conclusion

I tried to overstress the importance of interpreting the Bible from the position of the original hearers and readers rather than a 21st century retrospect. It is my belief that works salvation falters at this point, for it often entails interjecting modern day meanings of words and expressions into the Biblical text. I remain convinced that if the Bible is properly interpreted, there is not one verse that teaches other than salvation by the grace of God.

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* Livingston Blauvelt, Jr., *Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?*, (Bibliotheca Sacra, 1986), 42.