

## Final Judgment Where Conduct Did Matter



Having my coffee and doing some thinking and searching. I have been on a social medium called Facebook, and there seems to be a common thread that is always posted and it has to do with “moral conduct.”

When talking about holy living, there are those who would expect *flawless perfection* at every minute of the day. I often hear the questions,

"Do you sin?" "Do you live a sinless life"? "Have you sinned since you became a Christian?" Yes, the road is narrow, folks, but it's not a straight line, and don't make this comment the idea of giving permission to sin because there is sin leading to death and sin that does not. There is never permission to sin.

I had a person ask me last night, “Help me understand something. Are you all saying a Christian who decides to sin isn't saved?”

It seems many look at the word “saved,” as though this is a onetime act. There is initial salvation, but we must keep walking in faithfulness to receive positive judgment and saving of our souls. Peter says, “...*obtaining the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*”

All through the Bible we see *moral exhortations*. Why? Because it's so easy to fall back into the snare of sin if we are not careful. As Paul says, “...*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*” (Php. 2:12)

God will make judgment implicitly on a person's heart and present disposition. There are those who seem to think that there must be *flawless perfection*, and as if a person does not have the ability to sin after converting to Christ. We'll have to admit, even when reading through the Scriptures, the nation of Israel for example, did not have flawless perfection. I don't believe God is going to judge based on flawless perfection, but it does seem that God will judge based on the *consistency, integrity, and authenticity* of action, and will use corrective chastisement (as He did with Israel) and *warnings* to those who seriously go wayward, to hopefully bring them to repentance and a renewed commitment to God's way. (The people of Nineveh are another example.)

As someone aptly said,

"The 'righteous' are not necessarily characterized by a flawless obedience, but by the proper attitude of faith and commitment, evidenced by generally consistent outward obedience."

On the other hand, we must look at the biblical definition of a 'sinner'. A sinner is one who is characterized by *habitually sinning, does not repent, and defies God*. A person can only be one of these - either a 'sinner' or 'righteous,' but not both.

At the final judgment, a person's repentance and character will be taken into account. God always gives room for mercy and forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation.

"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?"

A person who desires to please God and do good is placed among the righteous, and those who intentionally reject God and virtue are placed among the wicked. Jesus told us that we will be judged based on our conduct.

"The hour is coming when all who are in the their graves will hear his voice and will come out - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

There is a more detailed description at the last judgment found in Matt. 25:31-46. In those passages we can see where we will be judged according to our deeds, our conduct, if you will. We will be judged by our *consistency, integrity, and authenticity* of action and given eternal life. Those who failed to do such things will be rejected by God. They may have cried Lord, Lord, and brag about how they prophesied in his name and cast out demons in his name, but they never did the "*will of the Father.*" Some may even cry, "*We went to church more than once a week, we had our bible studies, we had our fellowship and prayer meetings together.*" The will of the Father is to help the helpless, the poor and the hungry - to help our neighbor when it is in our power to do so – to be kind and do good. To neglect doing the will of the Father, one is labeled as 'evil doers.'

Jesus will not clean up our conduct. We need to do that. When Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, he told them to either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad.

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

*Our actions indicate the character of our heart.* Jesus says,

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting,

wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride foolishness. All these evil things come from within and they defile a person.” Mark 7:20-23

Our hearts will either reflect goodness or evilness and will manifest itself in our actions and words.

When people cry "no works," they go against the very words of Jesus.

Here is another instance where Jesus talked about conduct. A young rich man approached Jesus and asked him a question. “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” Notice what he asked when talking about *obtaining eternal life*, "what GOOD THING SHALL I DO...." If works did not matter, Jesus had every opportunity to straighten him out and tell the rich ruler that it's not a matter of works but 'faith only,' as so many falsely proclaim today.

Jesus answered:

"...if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Then he said to Him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The young man said to Him, ‘All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property."

Jesus told the man exactly what he needed to do to enter life and added one more commandment for him, that is, to share his riches with the poor. This man had everything, he had much wealth, but he knew something was missing. There is nothing wrong with material blessings, however, when we become possessed with our possessions (like the young rich ruler), then it is wrong. If we have been blessed in such a way, then we have the means to help others and should do so.

The general tone and emphasis of Jesus' teachings concerned moral righteousness, love of God and one's neighbor, and the state of one's heart.

Jesus clearly shows that *conduct* forms the criterion for eternal life. He says elsewhere,

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

It is clear that behavior affects how God will judge us. For example, if we don't forgive, He will not forgive us. God forgiving us is conditioned upon us forgiving others.

Paul says the same, how we will be judged based on our conduct. He said God

"...will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation." (Rom. 2:6-8).

Paul also says our conscience will bear witness to our deeds whether they are good or evil. Our conscience will either accuse or excuse us.

We are told the wicked and immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Again, conduct.

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God."

Col. 3:25 says,

"For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."

Again, conduct.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." 2 Cor. 5:10

Peter was in tune as well.

"If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*;" 1 Peter 1:17

It is clear through the whole Bible that we will be judged according to our moral or immoral behavior. We are to do good and stay away from evil passions. We are taught to live in godliness and holiness. This is taught throughout the Bible, right up to the book of Revelation where we read,

"And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." Rev. 20:12

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to everyone according to his work." Rev. 22:12

“...I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.” Rev. 2:23

We see that God will judge according to one’s character and behavior. He will judge favorably on those who do good and condemn the wicked.

Works don’t matter? Preachers who preach that works do not matter lead others astray from the teachings of Christ. We must walk worthy of him and pleasing in his sight. As the writer of Hebrews said, “We must consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.” Many people may make a profession of being a Christian, but only those who do good will be saved. When we do good, we encourage moral actions of others. We are an example to them as Christ was our example. When Jesus walked this earth, his aim was to turn men from their wicked ways. He often told them to “go and sin no more.” In the end God will reward the good and punish the wicked.

Does a Christian sin? Are there Christians who sin after making a commitment to Christ? Sadly, yes. Just because a person experiences a moral transformation in their life does not mean he/she has lost all ability to sin. We sin because we have a free will. A person can choose to sin at anytime. But if we truly love God, we will not want to sin against him. The Bible says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, and when we are faced with temptations, there is a way of escape. No Christian has to give into sin. Sinning is not the way of life for those who have committed their life to Christ.

In John’s epistle he writes to encourage us *not to sin*, but **IF** we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father. Some may say that 1 John 2:1 has nothing to do with Christians. I would have to disagree because for those not in the faith, it is not a matter of “**if**” they sin, because the fact is, those outside the faith continually sin, and so it doesn’t make sense to say this pertains to those outside the faith.

There are some Christians who would make sure that all others toll the straight line. In others words, they would make one feel as though if they ever slip even once, they have one foot in hell. If a Christian happens to commit a certain sin, it does not mean he/she is automatically damned to hell. However, if they persist in that sin they are in DANGER of hell and must repent (stop that sin) before they physically die in it. Sin is not something to play with. Sin can harden the heart.

“Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in **falling away from the living God.** But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, **if** we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.” Hebrews 3:11–14

In the Scriptures we are continually encouraged:

- “Go and sin no more!” John 5:14, 8:11
- “Depart from iniquity!” 2 Tim. 2:19, Matt. 7:21-23

- “Awake to righteousness and sin not!” 1 Cor. 15:34
- “Let the wicked forsake his ways!” Isa. 55:7
- “Wash yourself, make yourself clean. Put away the evil of your doings. Cease to do evil, learn to do well!” Isa. 1:16
- “Turn from your evil ways, amend the evil of your doings.” Jer. 26:3,13

And what’s the first question we hear? “Do you sin?” It appears the enemy loves nothing better than to instill defeat in a person. Such questions give the impression that moral behavior is impossible.

One thing we do know for sure and that is, not all sins are of the same degree. Jesus talked about those who had the **greater** sin.

Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered me to you has *the greater sin.*”

The degree of sin is always based on knowledge (Luke 12:46-48). John says there is a **sin unto death** (1 John 5:14-17). Paul says the same thing,

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of **sin unto death**, or of obedience unto righteousness?”  
Romans 6:16

There are greater sins that will **disqualify** us from the kingdom of God.

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:19-21)

"For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Eph. 5:5-6)

"But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Rev. 21:8)



"But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." (Rev. 22:15, etc.)

That is **sin unto death** and will disqualify one from the kingdom.

Now, in the Bible we are told not to be anxious about anything (Phil. 4:6); to give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:18); we are supposed to be humble and gentle (Eph. 4:2). We would have to admit that sometimes we fail in some of these areas at times, but it is not a continuous way of life for us. When we start to let anxiousness dominate us, the Holy Spirit gently convicts us. When we find that we are holding onto bitterness because we have been hurt, the Holy Spirit will convict us. We all have a human nature with natural human responses, God made us this way, but we must not let them get out of control.

Preachers today will tell us that those who continue in these vile sins (listed above) are still guaranteed eternal life because of a profession of faith made at some point in their past. Your soul is at stake if you believe this. A true child of God produces righteousness, a right way of living, not sinning everyday in thought, word, and deed. There is no such thing as a fornicating Christian, a Christian thief, a Christian liar, a Christian child molester, a Christian idolater, a Christian drunkard, and so on.

As said above, God will judge us according to our conduct. This doesn't mean judged by *flawless obedience*. He will judge us by our attitude of faith and commitment, evidenced by generally consistent outward obedience. God is going to judge according to **consistency**, **integrity**, and **authenticity** (motive) of action. He will judge the heart and present disposition and will judge accordingly. He will separate the fake from the genuine.

### Following Christ

I remember reading where a preacher mocked a translation of the Scriptures where instead of using the word "follow," it uses the word "imitate." He said if we are to imitate Jesus, then we should be walking on water, healing the sick, forgiving sins, feeding thousands with a mere piece of bread, etc. etc..

There is nothing wrong with imitating someone if they are a good example. *Imitate* means to *follow a pattern, model, or example*. Children are very good at imitating people and following their pattern, model, and example of adults and their peers. Some are bad influences where others can be good. Following Jesus would be our best example of a pattern to follow.

Clement of Alexandria said about Jesus, "*God having made known to us the face of righteousness in the person of Jesus.*" Paul says Jesus is the "*wisdom of God.*" Christians are taught to follow Jesus' example. Why? Because we will be judged based on conduct. Jesus was obedient to the Father. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death of a cross. Therefore God highly exalted him..."

Following Jesus, or imitating Jesus, gives us confidence of obtaining a positive judgment. John says,

“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the Day of Judgment, because as he is, so are we in the world.” (1 John 4:17).

To get away with evil doings, people will claim they are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. In other words, they claim Jesus’ righteousness is imputed (by *impute* they mean the *transfer* of Jesus’ moral character) to them, which the Bible never claims. God is not morally blind. There is no covering for those who walk in darkness. John said not to be deceived about this matter for everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he (Jesus) is righteous. (1 John 3:7) We have to walk as Christ walked. (1 John 2:6).

We all learn by imitating someone. We may learn by someone’s teaching, but obeying teachings went hand in hand with imitating the teacher’s example. Jesus is our teacher. Jesus is the **Way**, the **Truth**, and the **Life**.

In the New Testament, the believers were referred to as “followers of the Way.” Paul says in Acts 22 that he persecuted “*this way which they call a sect.*” Jesus is the **Way**. We follow Him, the Great Shepherd. He has made the path. Jesus is also the **Truth**. This means “what is right,” not just in a factual sense, but in a moral sense of right conduct as well. The term “**Life**” is Jesus as our role model how we should live. So the phrase clearly demonstrates that Jesus is indeed the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We are to obey Jesus’ teachings and example.

Following Jesus, or imitating Jesus, is a major theme throughout the New Testament. Peter encouraged the believers to “*live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God.*”

We should also not let the possibility of suffering deter us. In the book of Hebrews it represents Jesus’ suffering as an example of perseverance through opposition to his cause.

Paul says we should have the same ‘mind’ as Christ, that is, by developing similar thoughts and character. We are exhorted to mature and become like Jesus in moral stature and service to others.

We are taught, “*Be imitators of God, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.*” (Eph. 5:1) Paul used metaphors to relay this truth. He says,

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have *clothed yourselves with Christ.*”

By following Christ, by imitating him and his way of life, it is characterized like one putting on a garment. He also says,

“My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is *formed in you.*”



Christ is formed in us as we obey our teacher and imitate him on a daily basis. If we want to be more like Jesus, we need to obey his teachings. Jesus will not be formed in us if we sit and do nothing. We must do things like take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Cor. 10:6) Peter always encourages his readers not to go back to being conformed to the former lusts, but to conduct themselves after the manner of Christ, to be holy in all our behavior, as obedient children. (1 Peter 1:14-15)

### **In Christ and Abiding in Christ**

The Bible uses a lot of metaphorical language when it comes to imitating or following Jesus. For instance, Paul uses such metaphors as being “*in Christ*.” He uses the variation of this phrase at least 147 times. The early believers did not find this phrase hard to grasp. To be *in Christ* is simply the idea of similarity in the character and conduct that comes by imitating Christ. It is a relationship which believers obey Christ, follow his teachings and lives under Christ as his or her Lord.

We always hear the phrase to be *Christlike*. That means being similar to Christ in terms of character and conduct and only then can people participate ‘*in him*’. Clement wrote about how Christians are “*assimilated to God by a participation in moral excellence.*” Peter also brings this similar idea, which has to do with moral conduct.

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” 2 Peter 1:2-4

Because of the influence of Greek philosophy held by many today, when Peter speaks of “divine nature,” it is automatically assumed that Peter is talking about the very *essence* of God rather than His *moral character*. (The context clearly demonstrates moral character. See verses 5-8).

Being “*in Christ*” implied a similarity with Christ in moral terms of character and conduct. Paul says there is no condemnation to those who are *in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* This has to do with being morally upright in one’s conduct. Paul says whoever is in Christ is a new creature. We are a *new man* because we are not *walking after the flesh*, meaning doing the *works of the flesh* (Gal. 5:19-2). Again, having to do with conduct. Those who repent of their sins are no longer walking in sin. It means the person is now obeying Jesus and walking with him. The old man is DEAD. The old man is all that we were in every aspect of our being before we came to Jesus in faith and repentance. The old man is crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). He is supposed to be dead! The *new man* (new creature) now sustains a relationship only to Christ. The new man should not be living a life of sin (1 John 3:6), but should be *abiding in Christ*. (John 15:6)

Paul told the believers in Ephesus that they have been “*taught in Christ.*” They had learned to change their immoral behavior and thinking. It is now virtue and holiness that characterizes their new life in Christ.

John speaks similar language as Paul when he talks about “*abiding in Christ.*” John says,

“Whosoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked.” (1 John 2:5-6)

*Abide* means to: accept or act in accordance with (a rule, decision, or recommendation).

So to *abide in Christ* is walking just as Jesus walked. John says in the next chapter that all who **obey his commandments** *abide in him*, and he abides in them, and those who love others abide in Christ. *Abiding in Christ* is done by obeying his commandments. It all has to do with our conduct.

So being *in Christ* or *abiding in Christ* is referred to conduct to that which Christ exemplified and taught – those who truly imitate Christ.

Jesus says if we abide in him we will bear much fruit. What is this fruit? It is the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22-23). If we “*live by the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:25) we will show the fruit of the Spirit. Though the fruit can be counterfeited, ***the condition of the heart cannot.*** There may be those who may seem to display many of the characteristics listed in Galatians 5:22-23, as unsaved people can at times, but they do not have the Holy Spirit. Their fruit does not last long. The good fruit is evidence of a godly character that is consistent and authentic. We show in our lives and conversation that the Spirit of God dwells in us.

### **Born Again**

Being ***born again*** is another metaphor Jesus uses. Because of Reformed Theology, they take the issue that once a person is *born again* he cannot be *unborn*. The problem with this is that the argument is based on natural fact and then applied to the spiritual. They also believe that being born again is a onetime act based on a prayer or just receiving Christ into their heart. They get into much philosophy that has nothing to do with the teachings of Christ. I hear conversations about the *sin nature* or *flesh nature*, *the old nature*, and *new nature*, as though there is some mysterious “other self” that co-exists within them, a type of personality disorder where there are two opposing inner forces striving for supremacy. I have also heard it said that once a person is born again they are *regened!* Folks, this pure philosophy.

Being *born again* has nothing to do with our bodies changing physically. Our nature does not change.

Being *born again* means a “**moral change**”. It is not physical or metaphysical change.

Jesus told Nicodemus about being “born again,” but Nicodemus did not understand. Nicodemus was looking at the physical aspect of what Jesus was saying. He says, “*How can a man be born*

when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Jesus responded, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things?"

Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel and did not know these things when he should have. The Old Testament speaks of a God giving us a new heart (Psa\_51:16-17; Eze\_11:19; Eze\_36:26.) But this new heart is not given until we repent of our sins; until there is a *moral change*.

We need to understand about being born again from the Jewish mindset of that time. Jesus was the first to use this term and it is mentioned once again by Peter. (1 Peter 1:23) The Greek word is translated as "*gennaō*" which does mean being born as in giving birth to children. In the Jewish sense it means "**one who brings other over to his way of life.**" The Greek word "*anōthen*" is translated as "*again*" and it means "*from above*" and it also means "*anew*". So being born again does not mean repeating some formulaic prayer or just *trusting* in Jesus. It has to do with conversion. *Convert* means *a person who has been persuaded to change their faith or other beliefs, which causes a change in form, character, or function.* Jesus brings others **over to His way of life** and **his way of life comes from above.**" However, Jesus is not going to force anyone over to his way of life. It requires action on our part, but it will first come down from above.

Before converting to Christ, we were lost and dead in trespasses and sins (not born that way). All of us were without Christ, having no hope (Eph. 2:12). All sinners are "children of the devil" and "sons of the evil one" (Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:10; Matt. 13:38). In our lost state, the devil was our spiritual father (John 8:44). Our relationship changed at the point of repentance and faith towards our Lord Jesus. God became our Father and we became the children of God.

It doesn't take much to switch back to having the devil as our spiritual father once again. One does not have to be "unborn" to do this. The person simply ceases to *abide in Christ*. He doesn't become "unborn," he simply "dies." **The opposite of birth is death.** Like Adam and Eve, one can die spiritually (Luke 15:24,32; Rom. 8:13; James 1:14,15; etc.). *Spiritual death* simply means a *moral and relational separation from God*. This comes about by sinning.

*Conversion comes at repentance. When we repent, it means a change of mind, inclinations and desires, which translates into a total change in character and conduct.* (Mt. 3:8; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:15; Jn. 8:34; 8:36; Lk. 19:1-10; Acts 26:20; 2 Co. 6:1; 5:17; 1 Thess. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:19; Titus. 2:11-12).

So when we are born again, it simply means a person who has been converted, a person who **now lives a life that is conformed to the will of God.** It is a *moral transformation*. The person who now walks in obedience will be given the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). To pin-point when this exactly happens in a person's life, no one really knows, but the person will. Some will say that evidence of having been baptized in the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. Paul clearly said that "not all speak in tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:30-31), so this is not a doctrinal matter that should divide the body of Christ. As Paul says, "*And I show you a still more excellent way.*" LOVE.

However, once a person is converted (born again), it is still possible to stop believing (Luke 8:13), have our faith destroyed (2 Tim. 2:18), quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), and for our faith to become shipwrecked (1 Tim. 1:19,20)

### **God Will Not Move the Mountain Until You Bring the Shovel**

Jesus offers the gift of salvation, but it comes with a price, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* This involves us taking a deliberate act of obedience to Christ.

A lot of people pray that God will change their desires and think there is nothing they can do to stop sinning and be born again. They cry that conversion has nothing to do with them taking a part in it. Most have the gospel in *reverse*. They think they can't do anything until they have been overpowered by the Holy Spirit and THEN they consider themselves *born again* and now God will clean up their life. The only problem with this is that God seems to be taking an awful long time to do this task. They think that since they now have the Holy Spirit, they will sin less and less and call this *progressive sanctification*. The only problem is that this progressive sanctification doesn't produce fruit that shows true repentance. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is not given to anyone until they obey God (Acts 5:32). God will not come into a dirty vessel that is still participating in sin. If one has to repent daily, then I say there is no true repentance. Repentance isn't a way of life; obedience to Jesus is the way of life.

There is no excuse for disobedience. People say they can't be holy without the Holy Spirit and yet claim they can't live a holy life when they HAVE the Holy Spirit! It's the same thing when they say they can't stop sinning without Jesus and then claim they still sin when they HAVE Jesus. They mock and sneer at the people who encourage them to live a holy life. They make it seem as though it's a sin to stop sinning!

### **Repentance Comes BEFORE Forgiveness of Sin.**

As we can see, throughout the Bible conduct (DEEDS) do matter and we will be judged based upon our conduct. Repentance does **not** come AFTER someone has been supposedly saved. Scripture shows that godly sorrow produces the repentance LEADING to salvation (2 Cor. 7:10). For some people this might be over a period of time and for others it is instantaneous. Whatever the case may be, repentance must come first BEFORE pardon and the Holy Spirit is given.

God clearly says that he is not willing that any should perish, but all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Jesus said, *“And if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”* Christ was lifted up from the earth on the cross. He draws all men, but that doesn't mean all men will accept the offer of salvation.

I don't like to use “big” words, but we must mention the word “Synergy.” *Synergy* is defined as *two or more things functioning together to produce a result not independently obtainable*. This

can be seen in the matter of repentance. Though God draws all men, it doesn't mean God is going to repent for us. We must do that. When we do our part, God will do His. This is *working together*.

“We then, as workers together with him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” (2 Cor. 6:1)

We are workers together with him, not alone, both parties are involved.

It also mentions “the grace of God.” This is not just unmerited favor. The definition of grace is: "Good will, loving-kindness, favor of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues."

This grace is extended to everyone, but there are those who do not want to be obedient to this grace that God has extended to all mankind.

Grace **teaches**. It instructs us:

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,"

To receive remission (forgiveness) of sins, we must do something.

"For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

If we were to ask a person, “Must a child molester stop molesting children before he can be saved?” Or “Does a thief have to stop stealing before he can be saved, or a fornicator have to stop fornicating or a drunkard stop drinking before he can be saved? The answers will vary, but the bottom line is that they will tell us one does not have to stop doing these things before they can be saved.

Wesley said the following:

*"We believe that man's creation in Godlikeness included ability to choose between right and wrong, and that thus he was made morally responsible; that through the fall of Adam he became depraved so that he **cannot now turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength** and works to faith and calling upon God. But we also believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is freely bestowed upon all men, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in His sight. We believe that man, though in the possession of the experience of*

*regeneration and entire sanctification, may fall from grace and apostatize and, unless he repent of his sin, be hopelessly and eternally lost."*

As we can see, he has the gospel in REVERSE. Though it might sound in line with the Scripture, it is not. The bottom line is that he says a man does not have the ability to obey in his own strength. The Bible is clear that the sin must stop (in repentance) BEFORE pardon can be granted.

Note the following:

*"Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon." Isa. 55:7*

*"Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; then the LORD will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you." Jer. 26:13*

The message of the Bible *assumes* that man is fully capable of obeying God and *doing* what God has said to do, namely repent, STOP what you're doing, and SEEK His mercy. This message is clear through the whole Bible.

People will say they can't stop sinning without Jesus or without the Holy Spirit. How do they explain the people of Nineveh?

*"So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." Jonah 3:5-10*

Here is the preaching of repentance and the manner in which the mercy of God is dispensed on the people. They did not need some *special grace* (some call it *Prevenient grace*), Jesus, or the Holy Spirit to overpower them so they could repent. The prophet told them the consequences of their actions if they continued in sin, but gave them the way of escape through repentance.

Also note that they did not assume they would be forgiven...they sought the mercy of God.

*"Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?"*



It's interesting that a drug addict can stop his dependence on drugs without Christ, a drunkard can stop drinking himself drunk without Christ, a thief can stop stealing without Christ, a person addicted to pornography can stop it without Christ, etc., but yet people who profess to be Christians have to sit back and wait for God to "clean up their life," as though they have no free will to make the right choices.

A person who is in bondage to indulgence is not a person incapable of choice, but rather a person who has made a series of choices resulting in surrender of his will to his lusts.

As with the drug addict, the drunkard, the thief, the liar, the person addicted to pornography, etc., who say they can't resist these temptations, often find new strength to do what they previously said they could not. For instance, tell the man addicted to pornography that if someone were to hold a gun to his head and threaten to shoot him if he were to look at the pornographic magazine, he will not look. This could be said of any sins. If the drunkard were told by his doctor that he only has six months to live if he keeps drinking, the drunkard suddenly has been empowered to overcome his bodily addiction.

What the unsaved person teaches us is that when they make a successful choice not to yield to their temptation, he has not only confirmed that one can cease from his wrong choices, but also **the power of free will**. However, people who profess to be Christians excuse their sins by saying they have not yet been delivered from their "sinful nature." They are constantly fighting this "mysterious other self," waiting for God to deliver them, but of course this struggle continues all through life and it won't end until they die!

Having said all this, the first thing people will cry is, "You are saying you can save yourself! The Bible says salvation is not of works! If we can stop sinning, we don't need Jesus!" But yet these same people claim they can't STOP sinning when they HAVE Jesus. As my friend Tommy has noted when it comes to *working together* with God:

*Working together with God isn't being prideful, or trying to earn His mercy by bragging "Look what I did," but it's more of being a doer of His word, obeying it from the heart, and also realizing that any willful rebellion and disobedience to His word leads to spiritual death and separation from God and His saving grace and power!*

We live in a day where good is called evil and evil is good. We are told that those who live righteous are self-righteous while those who are unrighteous, sinning everyday in thought, word, and deed are in the true faith! In other words, if you don't sin, you are a hypocrite, but if you do sin, you are good with God and are in the faith. What utter foolishness to believe obeying God is impossible and morally wrong!

I have given proof that "conduct" matters, but not in the sense that we can *save ourselves*. What we need is a *cleansing of sins*, and this we CANNOT do. As a friend once said, we need the atoning work of Jesus Christ because it is clear we haven't obeyed God, NOT because we couldn't obey God. In fact, it is because we have the ability to obey God that we are liable to punishment for our disobedience. And it is because we deserve punishment that we need His atonement. But if we couldn't obey, we couldn't be punished, and therefore wouldn't need Jesus.

While we are capable of obedience, our obedience is not capable of atoning for our sins. Therefore our ability to obey does not nullify the necessity for the atonement of Christ.

It is true that the influence of the Holy Spirit draws us to Christ and conviction of sin, and what JOY to be FORGIVEN of those sins, but it only comes when we turn (repent) from our evil ways. We have to do the cleaning (forsake sin) and God will do the pardoning. God is not going clean up anyone. Some people may give up certain sins for selfish reasons, but their hearts were never turned to Christ in faith and repentance.

There is no pardon of sins without repentance. Repentance is an attribute of authentic faith.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit is at work to convict people, to lead them to “godly sorrow.” It is a sorrow that is according to the will of God that produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation. (2 Cor. 7:10) If a person has the “sorrow of the world,” that means he has simply been “caught” and not sorry at all. He is void of godly sorrow that produce change in character. Peter, who denied Jesus, fell away from the Lord. Jesus said, “*But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not. And when you are converted, strengthen your brothers.*” Peter had godly sorrow. Peter wasn’t sorry he got caught, but he had a godly sorrow that brought about repentance and God was able to mightily use him.

All of the above has to do **with our conduct**. If works do not matter, as some proclaim, they have been totally blinded to the truth by the lies of others. Don’t let this happen to you, because it is YOUR soul at stake.

### **Holy Conduct**

The idea of holiness is hated more than any other Biblical doctrine, especially in the church of today.

Holiness is not a dirty word. It is the opposite of depravity in act, the opposite of sin.

Holiness is an inward and outward conformity to God’s will. Holy means to be set apart. We will not be holy until we first look to God and then imitate Him (Lev. 11:44; Eph. 5:1-2). Christ is our example of what it looks like to be holy. Colossians chapter 3 gives us a practical outline of what holiness looks like.

Some people measure holiness as a list of dos and don’ts. Some people will call sin what is not sin. A person who eats with his left hand might be considered a sin. If a woman doesn’t wear a dress it’s considered a sin. Nonsense! Get rid of the lists.

A person who loves God doesn’t worry about a list of rules because he has faith which *worketh by love*. (Gal. 5:6) It is the *type* of person he now is - the old creature whose life was full of sin is now a new creature who lives a life of love, hope and faith. In every aspect of our lives we have the kingdom of God shining and within us. (Luke 17:21)

## **Conduct does matter.**

*Stop offering the parts of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. Instead, offer yourselves to God as people who have been brought from death to life and the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness to God. Rom. 6:13*

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, **holy** and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will, Rom. 12:1-2*

### **As Jesus said:**

*"The hour is coming when all who are in the their graves will hear his voice and will come out - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."*

Many thanks to my brothers and sisters where I have gleaned from this study, especially from A.J. Wallace & R. D. Rusk in their book "[Moral Transformation](#) – The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation.