

Biblical Soteriology

[Acts 8:12-23](#)



Soteriology comes from two Greek terms: *soter*, meaning; "savior," and *logos*, meaning; "word, reason, or principle." Soteriology is the study of the doctrine of salvation. Soteriology discusses how Christ's death secures the salvation of those who believe. It helps us to understand the doctrines of redemption, justification, sanctification, propitiation, and the substitutionary atonement.

Within the professing church, there are two main views of soteriology: [Arminian](#) and [Calvinist](#). An Arminian is someone who thinks that man is responsible in the decision of salvation. They believe that the individual makes the choice as to whether to be saved or not. On the other hand, a Calvinist is someone who believes that salvation is of the Lord. They believe that it is God who chooses who will be saved. Within evangelical churches, there is ongoing debate on the issue of salvation. Is it by a choice of man's free will or of God's sovereign choice?

Within these two views are two other views that can be called Lordship salvation and the Free Grace position. I believe that most Calvinists and Arminians hold to the Lordship view, but among Calvinists and Arminians are those who hold to a Free Grace position.

Which of these views (if any) does the Bible teach? Which of these theological positions is a Biblical Soteriology? We, as believers, need to hold a theological position, we need a framework or grid to filter things through. And this grid or framework must be formed from a diligent study of the Bible. All theology must come from exegesis out of the text of the Bible. When we take our theology and force it on a text, that is called [eisogesis](#). We must allow the Bible to speak and then shape our theology from the Scripture. If you find that the Scriptures go against your theology, change your theology.

Let's examine these views in light of Scripture.

The Arminian view: The "[Arminian Manifesto](#)," published in the seventeenth century, states this as its fifth point: "It rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace by keeping up their faith; those who fail here fall away and are lost."

Does the Bible teach that believers can lose their salvation? No! And since it doesn't, it should be obvious that Arminian theology is bad theology.

[John 6:37-40](#) (NASB) "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. 38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. 40 "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

Christ will lose none of those that the Father has given Him. They are secure in Christ.

The only kind of life that Christ gives is everlasting!

The argument that we find in Romans 5:8-10 is the most powerful argument, with respect to assurance of our salvation, that can be found anywhere in the whole of Scripture:

Romans 5:8-10 (NASB) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Verse 9 says, "much more than"; this is an [*a fortiori* argument](#), which is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God has done the greater (verse 8), surely He will do the lesser (verse 9). Verse 10 also says, "much more"; now that we are reconciled, we shall be saved through sharing in His life. We are in Christ. We are accounted perfectly righteous, having paid the debt of sin and having fulfilled the law by our union with Jesus Christ.

If God sent His son to die for us while we were enemies, ungodly, sinners, how much more will He do for us now that we are His children and righteous? Because we share His life, we are eternally saved, eternally secure.

Romans 8:30 (NASB) and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

The chain of salvation is unbroken from predestination to glorification.

The Arminian view can't be right then; there is no possibility of a believer losing their salvation.

The other main view is **Calvinism**, which teaches that salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.

Calvin says, *"We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know His eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast: That He does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what He denies to others."*

Acts 13:46-48 (NASB) And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 "For thus the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU SHOULD BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Who is it that believed? Those who God had appointed to eternal life.

Spurgeon said, "If anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist, I should reply, *"He is one who says, Salvation is of the Lord."* I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this. It is the essence of the Bible."

It is my opinion that Calvinism is the correct soteriology. I'm pretty sure that most of you are with me on that. But within a Calvinistic soteriology, there are two views that are very important and very different. We want to spend our time this morning looking at these two views.

The Lordship view: This is probably the most widely accepted of the views among reformed thinkers. Those who hold to Lordship theology believe that if a person is truly a Christian, they **MUST** live a righteous obedient life. Without this practical righteousness, there is no reason for a person to think that they are a Christian.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his commentary on the "Sermon on the Mount," says this, *"Nothing is more dangerous than to rely only upon a correct belief and a fervent spirit, and to assume that, as long as you believe the right things and are zealous and keen and active concerning them, you are therefore of necessity a Christian."*

Do you see what he is saying? Being a Christian is more than just believing the right things, you must have obedience. He is not alone in this view.

According to Lordship Salvation, saving faith includes **submission and obedience**. Richard Belcher says, *"True saving faith includes in it a submission to the Lordship of Christ."* [how much?]

Another Lordship proponent says, *"Saving faith is trust in Christ Himself. It is a commitment of self in submission to all of Christ that is revealed."* [how much?]

John MacArthur says, *"Saving faith, then, is the whole of my being embracing all of Christ. Faith cannot be divorced from commitment."* [how much?] He also says, *"The true test of faith is this, does it produce obedience?"* [how much obedience?]

If not, it is not saving faith." Bailey Smith asserts, *"Saving faith is not mere intellectual assent, but it involves an act of submission on our part."* [how much?]

So those who hold to the Lordship view would say that true Christians live a life characterized by obedience to all that the Father has commanded.

Please get this: Jesus Christ is the only person who ever lived in complete obedience to the Father. All other men have sinned. The only reason that any person can get into heaven is because Jesus Christ's obedience is imputed to their account by faith:

Romans 5:19 (NASB) For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

I am righteous because of Christ's obedience that becomes mine by faith!

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB) He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Positionally, in my standing before God, I am completely righteous and totally obedient, because I am in Christ! Christ's obedience and righteousness has been imputed to my account. That is my position or standing. But when men talk about obedience being necessary to enter heaven, they are referring to practical obedience.

John MacArthur writes, *"Hell is undoubtedly full of people who did not actively oppose Jesus Christ but simply drifted into damnation by neglecting to respond to the gospel. Such people are in view in Hebrews 2:1-4. They are aware of the good news of salvation provided by Jesus Christ but aren't willing to **commit** their lives to Him"* (The Superiority Of Christ, p. 80).

Why does he say these people aren't believers? What do they lack? **Commitment!** John MacArthur gives this story to illustrate his point:

I will never forget a particular lady who came into my office and informed me that she was a prostitute. She said, "I need help; I'm desperate." So I presented the claims of Christ to her. Then I said, "Would you like to invite Jesus Christ into your life?" She said, "Yes, and she prayed." I said, "Now, I want you to do something. Do you have your book with all your contacts?" she said she did. I said, "Let's light a match to it and burn it." she looked at me and said, "What do you mean?" I said, "If you want to live for Jesus Christ, and you've truly accepted His forgiveness and met Him as your Savior, then you need to prove it." She said to me, "That book is worth a lot of money. I don't want to burn it." She put it back in her purse and looked me right in the eye and said, "I guess I don't really want Jesus, do I?" Then she left.

When it came down to counting the cost, she wasn't ready. I don't know what the outcome of that poor woman has been. I do know that she knew the facts and believed them, but she was not willing to make the sacrifice (The Superiority Of Christ p. 84).

Does a person need to commit his life, count the cost and sacrifice to be saved?

Revelation 22:17 (NASB) *And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*

Does that sound like a call to commitment, or sacrifice to you? If commitment or sacrifice is involved, how much is needed? How obedient do we have to be? How much do we have to sacrifice? Is 80% good enough? Is it 90%? Or maybe 95% obedience? We know that it's not 100% obedience, because nobody does that, nobody.

How much obedience is enough? Nobody can answer that question, which means we never know if we are doing enough, which means we never know if we are going to make it to heaven if getting to heaven is based upon our obedience.

If complete obedience to the will of God is necessary, then I think we are all in trouble. Notice what Paul said:

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NASB) *in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

What is God's will here? It is that we be thankful "in everything"! Are you? Will a person who is not thankful in everything go to hell? They are not doing the will of God! Do you see how complicated it gets when you require obedience as a necessary element of salvation?

The Lordship view has become very wide spread in the church today, **but is it biblical?** At issue here are three things:

- A. The Nature of faith;
- B. The relationship between faith and assurance;

- C. The effect of salvation. In other words, the debate centers around three critical questions: What must a person do to be saved? What must a person do to know he is saved? How will salvation show itself in one's life?

A. The Nature of Faith, or What must a person do to be saved? What exactly is saving faith? Saving faith is: Understanding and assent to the propositions of the gospel. It is not some special kind of faith in the sense that its quality or essence is different than other kinds of faith. There are not different kinds of faith, there are just different objects of faith.

We all know what faith is, for example: If I said, "He told me the check is in the mail, and I believed him." Are you going to ask me if I believed with my **head or my heart**? Of course not! You understand what I mean when I say that I believed him. But when it comes to Christianity, we look for some other understanding of faith. Faith is faith whether if be in Christianity or mathematics. Saving faith is taking God at His Word. It is believing what God has said:

Romans 4:20-21 (NASB) yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.

God made Abraham a promise, and Abraham believed Him that is faith. He believed that God would do what he said he would.

1 John 5:9-13 (NASB) If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. 11 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

Verse 9 is saying that we accept human testimony, how much more can we accept God's testimony. It's not that the faith that receives it is greater, but the testimony is greater, it's more reliable.

If I believe God's testimony about His son, I receive God's righteousness and have everlasting life. I'm not saying that everyone who says they are a Christian is one. It seems like everybody in this country thinks they're a Christian. I was talking to a man a couple of weeks ago who told me that he was a Christian. I asked him, "If you were to die right now and stand before God and He asked you 'Why should I let you into heaven' what would you tell Him. He said, "I'm not sure, I haven't been to confession lately." This man, though he said he was a Christian, had no clue of what the Bible taught about salvation. I proceeded to share the gospel with him. He was very interested in what I had to share.

The Lordship view has redefined saving faith, so it's more than just taking God at His word. To them, saving faith involves surrender, commitment, submission, repentance, and sacrifice. These additions are both linguistically invalid and biblically invalid. **Faith is simply believing:**

John 3:36 (NASB) "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The word translated "he who does not **obey**" in the NASV and "he who does not **believe**" in the KJV and the NKJV is the verb [apeitheo](#). The leading [Greek Lexicon of the New Testament](#), by

[Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker](#), makes a very insightful comment about *apeitheo*, which sheds light on John 3:36:

Since in the view of the early Christians, the supreme disobedience was a refusal to believe their gospel, *apeitheo* may be restricted in some passages to the meaning *disbelieve, be an unbeliever* (BAGD, p.82).

A person who trusts in Christ alone, obeys completely the will of the Father to believe in Jesus Christ alone for eternal salvation.

Augustine, who lived from A.D. 354-430 wrote, "*Faith is nothing else than to think with assent.*" John Calvin wrote, "*For as regards justification, faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God's favor but receiving from Christ what we lack.*"

John 20:30-31 (NASB) Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

"Jesus is the Christ" it is not the mere verbalization of this phrase that saves you. We must believe that Jesus is the Christ, and before we can believe it, we must understand what it means:

1 John 5:1 (NASB) Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

We must believe that Jesus is the Christ in the Johanian sense of the term. We must understand Christ as John does. How does John understand Christ?

John 11:25-27 (NASB) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."

In verse 27 Mary says that she believes the very thing that the gospel of John was written to bring her to believe. In verse 26 Jesus asks, "Do you believe this?" What is this? It is the statement about Jesus Himself that He gives in verse 25. He tells her that He is the resurrection and life. But that's not all He asks her to believe, Jesus is saying, "I guarantee resurrection and life to everyone who believes in Me." To believe that Jesus is the Christ is in essence to believe that He is the guarantor of eternal life to everyone who believes. So if I can make people understand what it means to believe that Jesus is the Christ, they'll either believe it or they won't. The Lordship view presents faith as if it were: "I have all the facts, and I believe them, but now I must **do** something with them, as though there's an extra step, an act of the will, surrender, commitment, or sacrifice. That is not biblical!

Romans 4:5 (NASB) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,

Saving faith is accepting the testimony of God. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? If you do, then on the testimony of scripture, you are saved, you possess everlasting life.

Benjamin Warfield, the Presbyterian who probably would not have put himself in my camp, said, *"The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith, or the attitude of faith, or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith."*

The truth is, technically, we're not saved by faith but *through* faith. Faith is the instrumental means; grace is the efficient means of our salvation. We're saved by Jesus Christ. We're saved by His grace. We're saved through faith. You would understand what I meant if I said to you, "I put the fire out with the hose." Now hoses don't put out fires. But hoses are the channels for water that puts the fire out. The hose is the instrumental means; the water is the efficient means. Faith is the instrumental means by which we are able to access our salvation through Jesus Christ.

John Robbins, in the foreword of Gordon Clarks's book, Faith and Saving Faith, writes, *"Belief of the truth, nothing more and nothing less, is what separates the saved from the damned. Those who maintain that there is something more than belief, are, quite literally, beyond belief."*

Let me give you a test to see if you understand this.

John 12:42-43 (NASB) Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

Were these individuals saved? Were they Christians? The Lordship view would say, "No", because they did not confess Him. But the Scripture says, "They believed in Him."

Mark A. Copeland, the author of the Executable Outlines, says, *"There are some who teach that as long as one believes in Jesus, they will be saved. That salvation is by 'faith only.' But there is such a thing as 'an unsaved believer.' There were some who believed in Jesus, but were not saved John 12:42-43. Let no one think that just because they 'believe' in Jesus, they have a free ticket into heaven!"*

John 5:24 (NASB) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Lordship theology causes people to doubt the testimony of Scripture. Faith is believing, and believing **alone** makes you a Christian:

Acts 8:12-13 (NASB) But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. 13 And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

The words "believe and believed" are used 37 times in Acts, and they clearly refer to those who have trusted Christ and are saved:

Acts 10:43 (NASB) "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Acts 13:39 (NASB) and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

The Word of God says that Simon believed; to say that he didn't is to question inspiration. Notice what the text in Acts goes on to say:

Acts 8:18-23 (NASB) Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

Because of Simon's actions, many say that he was not a Christian, but the Bible says, "He believed." The Lordship view says: He can't be saved because there's no commitment, no sacrifice, no good works. But the Scripture says, "He believed." Now, who are you going to believe The Bible or men?

B. The relationship between faith and assurance, or What must a person do to know he is saved?

The Lordship view teaches that assurance comes from obedience, from holy living, from your works. Martin Luther said, *"For certainty does not come to me from any kind of reflection on myself and on my state. On the contrary it comes solely through hearing the word, solely because I cling to the word and its promises."*

John Calvin wrote, *"From one's work conscience feels more fear and consternation than assurance"* (Institutes of the Christian Religion, book 3, 14,20). John Calvin taught that assurance was of the essence of faith.

If good works are the basis of assurance, then the believer's eyes are distracted from the sufficiency of Christ and His work to meet his eternal need. His eyes are focused on himself. If I seek assurance through examining my good works, one of two things must necessarily result: (1) I will minimize the depth of my sinfulness; (2) I will see my deep sinfulness as hopelessly contrary to any conviction that I am saved.

Our assurance is to be based upon God's Word; His promise that He would give eternal life to all who believe on His Son. Assurance does not come from our works.

C. The effect of salvation, or How will salvation show itself in one's life? The Lordship view teaches that Christians can't apostatize (fall away from God); they must and will produce fruit. If heaven can't be obtained apart from obedience to God, then, logically, that **obedience is a condition for getting there.**

One writer who holds the Lordship view says: *"The life of God in man will always produce a righteous pattern, and if you have an unrighteous pattern in your life, you are fighting against the very nature God has created in you. It's like holding your breath, it's a lot harder than breathing."*

Is unrighteousness like holding your breath? Or is it more like breathing? Living a holy life is not easy, it takes constant diligence. We must live in constant dependence on God.

The Lordship view teaches that in order to be a Christian, you must do **more** than believe the gospel. I see this as adding to the gospel; it is totally unbiblical!

Free Grace view: This view teaches that a person becomes a Christian when they understand and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. At that moment they are placed into the body of Christ, given Christ's righteousness, indwelt by God, and are as sure of heaven as if they were already there. They are "in Christ."

Because God permanently indwells, His power is constantly available to the believer. That power will not operate in the Christian's life, however, unless he personally appropriates it by faith. Moment by moment the believer must trust God rather than himself to give him power for victory in daily life.

God calls all believers to be disciples, but many will not pay the price. Salvation is a free gift of God's grace, but discipleship is costly. Salvation is our birth in the Christian life, and discipleship is our education and maturity in the Christian life. Eternal life is a gift of grace to all who believe; but notice what Luke says about discipleship:

Luke 14:33 (NASB) "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

Discipleship is a call to forsake all and follow Christ. Can this be talking about the same thing as John in John 3:16?

Just because we are saved, this does not mean we can live as we please and do as we wish. Grace does not give us a license to sin or constitute an excuse for carelessness. Remember, who the Lord loves, He chastens. To live in sin will cost us temporally. Sin, any sin, all sin, will cost us in this life:

Matthew 18:32-35 (NASB) "Then summoning him, his lord said^ to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Here we see one who has been forgiven (a believer) being turned over to the torturers because of sin in his life. Verse 35 tells us that God will do the same to us if we live in sin.

What if I'm wrong? What if the Free Grace view is not correct? Let's think about this. If I'm wrong, what damage could this view possibly cause? If the Free Grace view is wrong, it could cause people to think that they are saved when they're really not. It could be giving false hope to unbelievers. So what? Do you believe in election? Will the elect of God ever be lost? No! Will the reprobate ever be saved? No! So, in my opinion, the worst that the Free Grace view will do is give false hope to the reprobate.

If the Lordship teaching is wrong, what harm can it do? It can cause a believer to think that they are not redeemed because of sin in their life. This view can bring the elect under guilt and condemnation. It can cause a believer to give up on Christianity by making them doubt that they really are saved. Notice what Jesus said about those who harm His flock:

Matthew 18:6 (NASB) but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

The Lordship view can hurt the church of God by causing Christians to live in guilt and doubt. But the worse that the Free Grace view does is give the reprobate false hope. As I see it, only the Lordship view is harmful to the church. We all must admit that neither of these views can change the destiny of the elect. Selah!

This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on January 7, 2007. [Tape #357b](#).



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