

# Rethinking Salvation

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## Introduction

In the effort to make the plan of salvation simple for presentation, we run the risk of missing some of the details. For an initial presentation, easy to understand analogies and diagrams may be the best approach. But as we become more mature, it is wise to consider the salvation plan in detail. Our eternal salvation depends on us getting it right.

Bearing in mind the consequences of not getting it right, we should invest some time in studying the issue. The main questions are, from what are we saved, what is the mechanism of salvation, and what is the trigger for the mechanism to have effect in our lives.

In this study, we will reference texts dealing with the 'Gospel', 'repentance', 'good deeds in accordance with repentance', 'hell', 'the kingdom', 'eternal life', 'grace', 'saved' and the like. In keeping with my standard study approach, we will examine the context of the references, and contemplate the broad background picture. Many times, the real meaning of verses can get lost in the shuffle if read removed from the context and backdrop.

### Salvation from ...

When pondering from which we are saved, the typical response is 'from hell'. However 'hell' is a symptom of a root problem. The root problem is sin. We deserve to go to hell an account of our sin.

*Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Sin is simply missing out on God's perfection. The consequence of sin is found here:

*Matthew 18:9 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into fiery hell.*

While it is understandable to focus on avoiding hell, in achieving that goal, we must deal with the trigger that sends us there, namely, 'sin'. The salvation plan of God must then regenerate us out of sin and into the glory of God.

### The Savior

*Matthew 1:21 ... and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.*

The mission of Jesus was to save people from their sins. As we study the issue of salvation, we cannot lose sight of from what we are saved. If we do, we come to false conclusions as to what God demands.

*Acts 4:12 (in speaking of Jesus) And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.*

What Jesus has done is unique. No other can follow suit.

## The Salvation Mechanism

The mission of Jesus harkens back to the sacrificial rituals performed by the Levite priests.

*Numbers 18:1 The LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and your tribe with you must bear the iniquity of the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you must bear the iniquity of your priesthood.*

Aaron, the first high priest of the Levitical order, dealt with the iniquity/sin of the nation of Israel.

*Numbers 18:5 You will be responsible for the care of the sanctuary and the care of the altar, so that there will be no more wrath on the Israelites.*

The rituals had the effect that the wrath of God would be turned away from the Israelites.

*Romans 6:23 For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The bottom line is that the result of sin is death. However, something else can die on our behalf. The Levitical rituals in the sacrificing of cattle did this. However, cattle cannot atone for man, for cattle is an imperfect sacrifice on a few counts. Man has more worth than cattle; how can that of lesser worth be a substitute for that of greater worth? The cattle was not perfect; how can the imperfect make the imperfect perfect.

*Hebrews 7:11 So if perfection had in fact been possible through the Levitical priesthood—for on that basis the people received the law—what further need would there have been for another priest to arise ...*

Under these conditions, it is clear that the real solution is that a man substitute himself for a man, and indeed, the substitution must be perfect. The only solution is that God, who is perfect, becomes a man, and offers himself as the substitute. At this point, the punishment for sin, namely death, has been satisfied.

*Romans 5:18-19 Consequently, just as condemnation for all people came through one transgression, so too through the one righteous act came righteousness leading to life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man many will be made righteous.*

We will continue to learn about the mechanism of salvation as we proceed. Now we wish to set the stage for how this mechanism is triggered for the saved.

*Matthew 7:13-14 Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

From this reference we know that some enter eternal life, while others do not. It is understood that there is some dividing line between those on the broad way, and those on the narrow way. Some are going through the wide gate and walking on the spacious way, and some are passing through the narrow gate and walking on the difficult way. The focus of this study is to determine what it takes go through one gate or the other, and to walk on one path or another. Since this determination is of utmost importance (a understatement if there ever was one), we can assume that Jesus, his prophets and apostles would teach us what makes the difference.

Based upon this verse, what is intriguing is the following: most people read 'walk on the way first', then 'enter the gate into heaven'. However, it is clear that one first passes a gate which leads onto the way. Salvation leading to eternal life requires first passing through a gate, and then second traveling down a way.

The second issue we can glean from this reference is that the way that leads to life is 'difficult'. Difficult is defined here:

*Needing much effort or skill to accomplish, deal with; characterized by or causing hardships or problems.*

From the start, we know that salvation to eternal life is not 'easy'. It stands to reason that the road to destruction is easy. If the plan of salvation that you, dear reader, is easy, may I suggest that your plan of salvation is no plan of salvation at all. Likely, you have walked through the wide gate and are walking down the spacious way. Again, considering the consequences, it behooves us to find out what the truth is on this matter. Getting this wrong results in going to hell. And you should be careful to understand that the devil will package the lie to look like the truth. He has been doing this for a long time. We have to be wise to his schemes.

Psalms 119:98 Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for I am always aware of them.

With that said, before we review a bridge diagram, say the 'sinners prayer' and call it a day, let us research the matter with all seriousness and objective reality. We want to be among the 'few' that find the narrow gate. Let us begin by studying the 'Gospel'.

## The Gospel

*Mark 16:15-16 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned.*

Believing the gospel leads to salvation. To start, we have to define the term 'gospel'.

*Acts 16:30-31 Then he brought them outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."*

Next we have to determine what 'believing' entails.

*1 Cor. 15:1-4 Now I make known to you brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . .*

This reference provides the most direct definition of the term 'gospel'. However, the term 'gospel' is given more meaning in other scriptures, which we shall attend to. Before we do that, what can we learn from this reference?

Paul places emphasis that the gospel is the historical account of Jesus: he died for our sins, he was buried, and then he arose.

Our first comment is that Jesus died for our 'sins', not for our 'going to hell'. This comment alludes to our discussion concerning 'from what are we saved?'. Jesus came to save us from sin. Not going to hell is a by-product. Saving us from sin is more important to God than saving us from hell. We do well to keep this in mind.

*1 Peter 1:16 for it is written, "You shall be holy, because I am holy."*

Any 'gospel' that does not focus on the salvation from sin is the broad way. The motivation for 'believing' is to be saved from sin, not to avoid hell. The 'difficult' way must have something to do with our struggle against sin. The 'easy' way avoids dealing with sin.

*Acts 3:26 God raised up his servant and sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each one of you from your iniquities.*

Again, God's number one mission for Jesus was to turn us from iniquities, not get us out of hell.

Our second comment highlights the word 'if': 'if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain'. What happens 'if you hold fast'? 'you are saved'. And this is where the 'difficult way' comes in. We are saved if and only if we hold fast. Otherwise, we have believed in vain. We define the term 'vain' here:

*Producing no result; useless*

The straightforward interpretation is that believing the gospel saves us *unless* we do not hold fast. At this point, the sober individual will very much want to know what does 'holding fast' entail!

## Romans 1 and 2

Let us uncover portions of the gospel that are often neglected.

*Romans 2:16 on the day when God will judge the secrets of human hearts, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.*

Paul is writing about the gospel. He reveals that judgement is part and parcel to the gospel. This is the first portion of the gospel that is often overlooked. 'God will judge ... according to my gospel ...'. To fully understand this, we note that Romans 2:16 is actually the end of a section that begins here:

*Romans 1:11-14 For I long to see you, so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually comforted by one another's faith, both yours and mine. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I often intended to come to you (and was prevented until now), so that I may have some fruit even among you, just as I already have among the rest of the Gentiles. I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.*

Paul is looking to encourage, and is looking for fruit. In order to do this, he says he will preach to them the gospel:

*Romans 1:15-18 Thus I am eager also to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, "The righteous by faith will live." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness,*

*Romans 1:32 Although they fully know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but also approve of those who practice them.*

We will investigate the full discussion (Romans 1:11 through Romans 2:16) to uncover what is meant by 'judgement' when speaking to believers.

We also understand that Paul is eager to preach the gospel to those who are in Rome. Those who are in Rome are already believers. He wants to preach the gospel to those who are already believers. This suggests that 'believing' is not a one time event, but rather a continual process: more on this thought later in our study. Paul understood that believers need to hear and obey the faith, resulting in fruit. This is a second portion of the gospel that is overlooked.

*Romans 1:5-6 Through him we have received grace and our apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of his name. You also are among them, called to belong to Jesus Christ.*

Believing requires a follow on action. Believing requires obedience. The whole point of the grace and apostleship is to bring about obedience of faith.

*Luke 6:46 Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do what I tell you?*

Our Lord is whomever we obey. Those who disobey Him do not belong to him. Obedience is a very important portion of the gospel. Without it, the gospel has no effect.

Starting in verse 18 he begins his discourse about 'judgement' in the framework of the gospel, '*For the wrath of God is revealed ...*'. This is the same 'judgement' referred to in Romans 2:16. Romans 1:15 through Romans 2:16 is one topic: the gospel and the associated impending judgement for the disobedient. Read through the meat of the discourse while keeping in mind that Paul is speaking to believers.

*Romans 2:2-3 Now we know that God's judgment is in accordance with truth against those who practice such things. And do you think, whoever you are, when you judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape God's judgment?*

Romans was written in response to happenings in the Church in Roman. The believers in Rome were judging others of wrong doings, wrong doings that they themselves were doing. Paul reminds the believers that they will not escape judgement. This statement is in spite of the fact that they are believers. Paul very clearly warns the believers that they will be judged.

*Romans 2:4-5 Or do you have contempt for the wealth of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, and yet do not know that God's kindness leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed!*

Paul contrasts repentance and the unrepentant heart. The unrepentant heart of the 'believer' leads one to judgement. In this contrast, it is understood that repentance leads to salvation.

*Acts 17:30-31 Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, he now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, having provided proof to everyone by raising him from the dead.*

Repentance is contrast against judgement. There can be no discussion or confusion: repentance is required to avoid the judgement.

Romans 1:5 mentions 'obedience to the faith' as well as:

*Romans 2:6-8 He will reward each one according to his works: eternal life to those who by perseverance in good works seek glory and honor and immortality, but wrath and anger to those who live in selfish ambition and do not obey the truth but follow unrighteousness.*

Eternal life is in view, not earthly rewards. Paul instructs the believers on the reward of works: those who do good works receive eternal life and immortality, those who live in selfish ambition and do not obey the truth receive wrath and anger. Some attempt to explain the 'wrath and anger' as 'temporal punishment' (on this planet, not eternal damnation). However, the plain reading of this comparison text does not allow that interpretation. The flip side of eternal life is eternal wrath.

Paul is pointing out the importance of obedience. He begins his letter to the believers in Rome in verse 1:5 mentioning 'obedience to the faith'. He closes out the same letter with the same idea.

Romans 16:25-27 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages, but now is disclosed, and through the prophetic scriptures has been made known to all the nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory forever! Amen.

The 'gospel', 'proclamation', 'revelation', 'command of the eternal God' are all one and the same, and have one goal: to bring about obedience of faith. And now we have a better understanding of 'believing': it must be accompanied by avoiding sin and good works.

This conclusion is only logical: if Jesus died to save us from our sins, and our sins put Him on the cross, then our acknowledgment of this truth demands that we refrain from doing that which put Him on the cross.

Standing back at Paul's writing, we perceive that Paul was correcting a false teaching. The Romans believed that they could judge others without being judged themselves, although they were performing the same evil deeds, because they were 'believers'. Paul corrected them by saying that they believers were destined for eternal wrath if they did not repent and turn from their sins.

As a review of the gospel discourse

- 1) Romans 1:5: obedience of faith
- 2) Romans 1:11-13: impart encouragement, see fruit
- 3) Romans 1:15: preach the gospel to the believers in Rome
- 4) Romans 1:16-17: salvation power of the gospel
- 5) Romans 1:18-32: description of the actions of those who do not live according to the gospel
- 6) Romans 2:1

## **Act 26**

Although the term 'gospel' is not used, Paul is discussing the gospel.

*Acts 26:17-18 (Jesus is speaking to Paul) I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*

Forgiveness of sins is the main goal.

*Acts 26:19-20 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but I declared to those in Damascus first, and then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds consistent with repentance.*

Paul is lucid: Jesus' goal of receiving forgiveness of sins and becoming sanctified is attained by repenting and performing deeds consistent with repentance. The idea that one can simply 'believe' is inconsistent with the teachings of Paul ... and the other writers of the New Testament as we will continue to see.

## 2 Corinthians 7

Again, although the term 'gospel' is not mentioned, it is understood that this discussion is about the 'gospel'.

*2 Corinthians 7:9-11* Now I rejoice, not because you were made sad, but because you were made sad to the point of repentance. For you were made sad as God intended, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation, leaving no regret, but worldly sadness brings about death. For see what this very thing, this sadness as God intended, has produced in you: what eagerness, what defense of yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what deep concern, what punishment!

Godly repentance leads to salvation. It is associated with indignation alarm, longing, concern, even punishment. True believers have an understanding of their sin, and have a longing to have it dealt with, removed. If you, dear reader, have not had this experience, now is a good time to examine yourself.

Taking all these things together, 'repentance' is the narrow gate that starts the journey, whereas the exercising of good works and avoiding sin is the 'difficult' way of the journey.

## Colossians 1

*Colossians 1:3* We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints. 5 Your faith and love have arisen from the hope laid up for you in heaven, which you have heard about in the message of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. Just as in the entire world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, so it has also been bearing fruit and growing among you from the first day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth. 7 You learned the gospel from Epaphras, our dear fellow slave—a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf— 8 who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

The gospel is the message of truth. The truth is, the true gospel bears fruit. Where there is no fruit, there is no gospel. The fruit occurs when the hearers understand the 'grace of God in truth'; for there exists an 'understanding of the grace of God' that is not in truth. And this false understanding of the grace of God is what the first Christians struggled with, the apostles taught against. The same is true today. The devil spreads a false understanding of grace so as to lead people onto the 'easy' and 'spacious' way.

*Colossians 1:9* For this reason we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects—bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for the display of all patience and steadfastness, joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. 13 He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul continues with the fruit of the gospel. He prays without ceasing that they live worthily of the Lord. We are to share in the inheritance in the light. We are delivered from darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the Son. In the kingdom of the Son, people act in a certain way.

## Titus 1

*Titus 1:1 From Paul, a slave of God and apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's chosen ones and the knowledge of the truth that is in keeping with godliness, 2 in hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the ages began. 3 But now in his own time he has made his message evident through the preaching I was entrusted with according to the command of God our Savior. 4 To Titus, my genuine son in a common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior!*

Although the term gospel is not used, Paul is talking about the gospel. This is his (God's) message through the preaching of Paul.

Faith is not stagnant, it presses on. Behold, it presses on into truth in keeping with holiness. And in the pressing on into godliness, we hope for eternal life.

*Titus 1:5 The reason I left you in Crete was to set in order the remaining matters and to appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. 6 An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful children who cannot be charged with dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be blameless as one entrusted with God's work, not arrogant, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain. 8 Instead he must be hospitable, devoted to what is good, sensible, upright, devout, and self-controlled. 9 He must hold firmly to the faithful message as it has been taught, so that he will be able to give exhortation in such healthy teaching and correct those who speak against it.*

In furthering the truth that is keeping with godliness, Titus is to set up elders that are themselves pressing into godliness, so that they can give exhortation and teaching about these things, and correct those who are against it.

*Titus 1:10 For there are many rebellious people, idle talkers, and deceivers, especially those with Jewish connections, 11 who must be silenced because they mislead whole families by teaching for dishonest gain what ought not to be taught. 12 A certain one of them, in fact, one of their own prophets, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 Such testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply that they may be healthy in the faith 14 and not pay attention to Jewish myths and commands of people who reject the truth. 15 All is pure to those who are pure. But to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They profess to know God but with their deeds they deny him, since they are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good deed.*

The reason we need elders who are godly is so that they may rebuke 'sharply' those who are not pressing into the truth that is in keeping with godliness. We believers must understand that 'truth' does not simply mean 'factually correct', but also, in Biblical usage, is encapsulated in the concept of godliness, performing good deeds. In God's eyes, there is no truth outside of godliness. The apostle John spoke about this in his gospel account and in his epistles.

Notice how Paul ties 'corrupt' and 'unbelieving' together. The fact is, there is no such thing as 'corrupt' and 'believing' or 'godly' and 'unbelieving'.

A general principle is suggested in verse 16. At some point, the fruit declares the tree to be good or evil. This is a very common theme in the gospel (using the term gospel as defined as the good news teaching of

the plan of salvation, and defined as the historical account of Jesus, namely in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). 'we know the tree by its fruit' concept is given in detail and at length by Paul in Romans 1 and 2.

*deny: state that one refuses to admit the truth or existence of.*

In this context, 'to deny Him' is the opposite of 'to know Him'.

**Verse 16 is a warning to those who believe that evil deeds do not disqualify the believer.** 'They profess to know God, but with their deeds they deny him.' Stopping right there, what happens to those who deny Him?

*Matthew 10:33 But whoever denies me before people, I will deny him also before my Father in heaven.*

What is the result of Jesus denying a person?

*Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven - only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ... 23 Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!'*

The defining issue in determining who does not enter the kingdom is here: Jesus labels those whom He denies as 'lawbreakers'. What did Paul say about those who need correction? That they are 'rebellious'. The rebellious are by definition law breakers.

It is no wonder that Paul says to rebuke sharply. **Living in accordance with the the truth and living in accordance with the godly life is a matter of eternal life and death, not how big our reward in heaven is going to be! Alas, we have to get there first!**

## I John

The book of first John is a gold mine when it comes to understanding the gospel. He uses the term twice. He also uses the terms 'light' and 'darkness'. To understand what he is speaking of, we reference the same terms in his gospel.

### John 1

*John 1:4-5 In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.*

Jesus owns life, and this life shines a light into the world of darkness. 'life' and 'light' go together, are inseparable. Following the John 3:16 verse, we find out what the light does:

### John 3

*John 3:19 Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God.*

Jesus makes his judgement dividing line clear. those who's deeds are evil stay in the dark in order to keep the judgement of their deeds hidden; these have not come to Jesus, the light. Those who practice truth come to the light in order to know (find out the truth of) what their deeds are; either good or bad. let us keep these things in mind when reading the letters of John.

### John 8

*John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke out again, "I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

The comparison is self evident. Followers of Jesus do not walk in darkness, but have the *light of life*. It is understood that those who do not follow Jesus walk in darkness, bringing the corresponding deeds, and do not have the light of life (they have death).

### John 12

*John 12:44 But Jesus shouted out, "The one who believes in me does not believe in me, but in the one who sent me, 45 and the one who sees me sees the one who sent me. 46 I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness. 47 If anyone hears my words and does not obey them, I do not judge him. For I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects me and does not accept my words has a judge; the word I have spoken will judge him at the last day. 49 For I have not spoken from my own authority, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is eternal life. Thus the things I say, I say just as the Father has told me."*

Jesus is shouting. This is an indication that something important is coming. Jesus has come as a light, so that those who believe should not remain in darkness, but move into the light. The light is where the deeds are shown for what they are. As a side note, the natural response to understanding that our deeds are evil before God is to repent. Those who do not repent are still in darkness.

Showing these concepts in a logical train we have the two possible responses to the gospel message:

Light of Jesus → move toward light → deeds revealed for what they are  
Light of Jesus → hide in the darkness → deeds hidden for what they are

Those who move toward the light move toward eternal life. Those who hide in darkness hide from eternal life.

## **I John 1**

*I John 1:5-10 Now this is the gospel message we have heard from him and announce to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.*

Here is a very clear line delimiting who is saved and who is not as borne out by walking either in darkness or in light. John 1:4 claims that the 'life was the light'. 'life' and 'light' go together. Either we have the one and the other, or not the one and not the other. It is impossible to have 'life' and not walk in the 'light'! The above, dear reader, is the gospel:

- 1) The liars are those who claim to be in fellowship with Him, but are walking in darkness (perform evil deeds). Consequently, these do not have life in accordance with John 1:4.
- 2) Those who walk in the light (perform good deeds) have fellowship with Jesus, and his blood cleanses us. Consequently, these have life in accordance with John 1:4.
- 3) The liars also claim we in our sin will not be judged.
- 4) The tight relationship between confessing sin and becoming clean is evident; there is a way out for the sinner in point (3).
- 5) Liars claim that they have not sinned.

We remind the reader that John has very clearly defined the gospel message above, for he begins the discourse with 'this is the gospel message'. I John 1:5-10 is a more detailed version of what Paul wrote in Titus 1:16.

## **I John 3**

*I John 3:3-8 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; indeed, sin is lawlessness. And you know that Jesus was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. Everyone who resides in him does not sin; everyone who sins has neither seen him nor known him. Little children, let no one deceive you: The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous. The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed: to destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.*

This text is straight forward and needs no comment. The gospel in short:

- 1) Jesus came to remove sin.

- 2) Let no one deceive us: those who continue in sin are not righteous.
- 3) Those who sin are of the devil.
- 4) The whole reason for Jesus' mission was to destroy sin.
- 5) Those born of God do not sin.

These ideas parallels the 'bearing fruit of righteousness' analogies in the Gospel books, especially the Gospel of John, written by the same author.

*1 John 3:11-12 For this is the gospel message that you have heard from the beginning: that we should love one another, not like Cain who was of the evil one and brutally murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, but his brother's were righteous.*

The gospel message has to do with actions, not dead beliefs. Be obedient to the faith. Love, do not hate. Those who hate are living in darkness, are not in the light, and not of Him. Those in the darkness do not have life. Those who love are in the light, and have life.

### John's Matrix

We have made a matrix to show what John is laying out:

Jesus	Devil
Life	Death
Light	Darkness
Love	Hate
Good Deeds	Evil Deeds
Believer	Unbeliever

The point is, we cannot mix and match the characteristics under Jesus with the characteristics under the Devil. In practical terms, a 'believer' cannot hate, walk in darkness, produce evil deeds, and be a son of the Devil. This person is a hypocrite, and will be dealt with accordingly. The one who walks in darkness, hates his brother, produces evil deeds cannot at the same time have the life of Jesus (eternal life). These do not mix.

Those of Jesus produce good deeds. Those of the Devil produce evil deeds. We shall know them by their fruit. Of who's son we are is most readily seen by our deed, not by our creed. Hypocrites have creeds, doers of the word have life.

If we want the life that Jesus has, we have to enter into the light. The closer we get to the light, the closer we get to the life, for the light comes out of the life in accordance with John 1:4. And to enter into the light requires that our deeds be judged for what they are. This can only be accomplished with a repentant heart; for the unrepentant runs from the light to hide from his deeds in accordance with John 3. Those who remain in the light do not continue in sin in accordance with the first book of John.

## Repentance, Fire and Fruit

*Luke 16:27-31 So the rich man said, 'Then I beg you, father—send Lazarus to my father's house (for I have five brothers) to warn them so that they don't come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they must respond to them.' Then the rich man said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He replied to him, 'If they do not respond to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'*

Not responding positively, not repenting, has the result of ending in torment. Also, repenting has the result of not ending in torment, that is, becoming 'saved' (from torment).

*Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach this message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

For what goal other than bringing people into right standing with God (being 'saved') does the call to 'repent' have? Since Jesus' mission was to save people from sin, it makes sense that his message would lead people to exactly that.

*Luke 24:47-48 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.*

Jesus, upon leaving this earth, gave a final command: preach repentance and the remission of sins. We have seen before that repentance and the remission of sin results in salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10).

The first apostles wasted no time. Their first preaching is recorded in Acts 2 and 3 below.

### Acts 2 and 3

*Acts 2:37-38 Now when they heard this (gospel story, history of Jesus), they were acutely distressed and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "What should we do, brothers?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

'Distressed' is a state of being we saw in 2 Corinthians 7:11. Repenting is directly tied to the forgiveness of sins. Again, this was Jesus' mission: make a way for the forgiveness of sin.

*Acts 2:40-41 With many other words he testified and exhorted them saying, "Save yourselves from this perverse (sin is in view) generation!" So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added (saved).*

In response to the Gospel (defined here as the history of Jesus), the brothers are commanded to 'repent'. In the same sitting, a turning from perversion (sin) is preached, and we read that 3,000 people were added. Even though 'salvation' as such is not mentioned, it can be safely assumed. Therefore, salvation (forgiveness of sin resulting in the avoiding of eternal damnation) is the result of repenting. If forgiveness of sin does not come through repenting, how else does it come according to this text?

*Acts 3:18-19 But the things God foretold long ago through all the prophets—that his Christ would suffer - he has fulfilled in this way (gospel story, history of Jesus). Therefore (in response to the gospel) repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out,*

Again, in accordance with Luke 24:47, the first apostles preached repentance for the remission of sin.

## **Acts 8**

*Acts 8:4-5 Now those who had been forced to scatter went around proclaiming the good news of the word. Philip went down to the main city of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ to them.*

*Acts 8:13 Even Simon himself believed, and after he was baptized, he stayed close to Philip constantly, and when he saw the signs and great miracles that were occurring, he was amazed.*

*Acts 8:18-19 Now Simon, when he saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, offered them money, saying, "Give me this power too, so that everyone I place my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit."*

*Acts 8:20-21 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could acquire God's gift with money! You have no share or part in this matter because your heart is not right before God!"*

*Acts 8:22-23 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that he may perhaps forgive you for the intent of your heart. For I see that you are bitterly envious and in bondage to sin.*

We must pay special note that Simon believed, was baptized, stayed close to Philip constantly, but in spite of that was on his way to perishing because his heart was not right before God, and he was in bondage to sin. Peter commanded him to repent. 'Believing' did Simon no good!

## **Acts 13**

*Acts 13:38b-39a forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by this one everyone who believes is justified*

*Acts 13:46b Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we are turning to the Gentiles.*

Forgiveness of sins is obtained by repentance, as seen before. 'Believing' incorporates repentance, for this is the natural response to the gospel message. Those who reject this message consider themselves not worthy of eternal life.

We must call to mind that the repentance message began long before the first chapters of Acts.

## **Matthew**

### **Matthew 3**

*Matthew 3:2 (John the Baptist speaking) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

If repenting is the proper response on account of being near the 'kingdom of heaven', the corollary might be then where there is no call to repentance, the 'kingdom of heaven' is not near.

*Matthew 3:6-10 and he was baptizing them in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath (judgement)? Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance, and don't think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Hell).*

Repentance must be proven with fruit. Furthermore, the fruit of repentance assumes first repentance. The cause for the fruits is the repentance. Without the fruit of repentance, there has been no true repentance. John the Baptist is stating what Paul stated in Romans 1 and 2.

Those who do not bear fruit are thrown into the fire. Continuing:

*Matthew 3:11-12 "I baptize you with water, for repentance, but the one coming after me is more powerful than I am - I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff he will burn up with inextinguishable fire."*

Jesus will separate the good from the bad. The bad will be burned with a fire that is inextinguishable. 'fire', inextinguishable or otherwise, in the gospel accounts (history of Jesus) is a symbol for hell. John writes here:

*Revelations 21:7-8 The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death."*

John is not confused as to what 'fire' means. This is exactly the same fire as referred to in the gospel accounts.

*Matthew 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me.'*

*Matthew 25:41-46 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels! 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. 43 I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and*

*did not give you whatever you needed?' 45 Then he will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.' 46 And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

The kingdom is prepared for man. The *eternal fire* is prepared for the devil and his angels. Those who do good works inherit the kingdom. Those who practice evil deeds follow the devil to his final destination, the eternal fire.

*Matthew 7:15-20 Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? 17 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will recognize them by their fruit.*

This text is so straightforward, it needs no commentary. Good trees bear good fruit. Bad trees bear bad fruit. Those who bear good fruit are good trees and those who bear evil fruit are evil trees. Evil trees are thrown into the fire. 'fire', as discussed above, is the place prepared for the devil and his angels.

*Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven - only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds?' 23 Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!'*

This text should make everyone wake up. The fact is, some who believe they are entering into the kingdom are in fact not doing so.

*Matthew 7:24-27 Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed!*

In another vast understatement, those who hears these words of Jesus, but do not do them, is like a foolish man. His house will be utterly destroyed.

Now is a poignant time to highlight the fact that in none of the 'eternal fire teachings' do we learn that 'believing in Him only' saves us from hell! In each and every case, the judgement line is 'who did evil?' and 'who did good?', 'who repented?' and 'who brought fruits of repentance?'. Note the location of the wide and narrow gate discussion: just prior to these verses!

*Matthew 7:13-14 Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.*

Jesus is speaking plainly. He is describing our life challenge in verses 13-14, and describes how to get into the narrow gate, and onto the difficult way in the following verses! Those who bring evil fruit are false prophets. Jesus will tell them, 'I never knew you'.

## Matthew 6

*Matthew 6:9-15 So pray this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. “For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins.*

Jesus is highlighting the most important prayer one can make. Notice the prominence of asking forgiveness of sins and forgiving others.

## Matthew 25

Judgement according to works

## Mark

### Mark 1

*Mark 1:1-4 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, the voice of one shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight.’” John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins.*

The first lines in a book are always of prime importance. It sets the backdrop and the framework by which everything that follows must be understood. This 'most important' message is 'repentance unto remission of sins'.

The 'preparing the way for the Lord' is defined/described as the preaching of 'the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins'. 'baptism' means 'immersion', or in the verb form, 'to submerge'. Immersing has to do with cleansing. The repentance results in the remission of sins.

The fact of the matter is, the Lord is coming, and He is coming to judge. He will find us whether we are ready or not. 'Preparing the way of the Lord' then is not so much to help the Lord, but to help us. If we are to be ready for his coming, we shall repent.

### Mark 6

Mark 6:6-7 He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.’

Hypocrites are people that honor Him with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him. Hypocrites claim that they are believers, but produce evil fruit. The produce of the hypocritical heart is shown here:

*Mark 7:21-23 For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. All these evils come from within and defile a person.”*

Jesus speaking of the end of the evil servant says:

*Matthew 24:48 But if that evil slave should say to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' 49 and he begins to beat his fellow slaves and to eat and drink with drunkards, 50 then the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not foresee, 51 and will cut him in two, and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The hypocrite and the evil servant both end in the same place. The place of weeping and gnashing of teeth is hell. Keeping this in mind, what shall we think when we read:

*Acts 16:29 Calling for lights, the jailer rushed in and fell down trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him, along with all those who were in his house.*

If this jailor had been a hypocrite, believing only in him, without works of repentance, would he have truly passed through the narrow gate to begin the journey on the difficult road? In the very next verse we read:

*Acts 16:33 At that hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and all his family were baptized right away. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set food before them, and he rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God, together with his entire household.*

You see, dear reader, 'believing in Him' and 'believing in God' produces results, good deeds. Those who do not produce good deeds, but all the while 'believe', are hypocrites, and their place will be with the evil slave.

## **Luke**

### **Luke 3**

*Luke 3:3-4 And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins; ... 'Prepare the way for the Lord, ...*

*Luke 3:7-8 So John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

Repent to prepare for the coming of the Lord. Fruits worthy of repentance are required when He comes.

What is instructive here is that the listeners had deluded themselves into believing they were saved on account of something other than what God demands: good works. It is the devil's scheme to have us believe that we can be in good standing with God, and therefore avoid hell, while living in sin. This was the spiritual conflict then. This is the spiritual conflict now. The terms may change in accordance with the prey's background, but the strategy is the same: believe and do anything except the one, repent and show fruits of repentance.

### **Luke 6**

*Luke 6:19-31*

### **Luke 11**

*Luke 11:1-4 Now Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he stopped, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." So he said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, may your name be honored; may your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And do not lead us into temptation."*

One would think that Jesus would add the most important issues when asked how to pray. In teaching how to pray, notice that asking for forgiveness of sins and forgiving others of theirs is included.

### **Luke 13**

*Luke 13:1-3 Now there were some present on that occasion who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. He answered them, "Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered these things? No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well!*

*Luke 13:4-5 Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them, do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you! But unless you repent you will all perish as well!"*

Although Jesus is responding to a story involving physical death, Jesus is speaking of spiritual death. Jesus is certainly not saying that those who do not repent will die a natural death like in the examples given. Nor is he teaching that those who repent will not be involved in unfortunate deaths of injustice or accidents. Therefore, repenting is required to avoid spiritual death. Jesus continues:

*Luke 13:6-9 Then Jesus told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the worker who tended the vineyard, 'For three years now, I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and each time I inspect it I find none. Cut it down! Why should it continue to deplete the soil?' But the worker answered him, 'Sir, leave it alone this year too, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. Then if it bears fruit next year, very well, but if not, you can cut it down."*

The analogy of fruit and being cut away is the exact same as in the teaching of John the Baptist. The owner of the tree is coming for inspections. We should be aware of this, and what happens when the inspector does not find what he is looking for.

### **Luke 18**

*Luke 18:9 Jesus also told this parable to some who were confident that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else. 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself like this: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: extortionists, unrighteous people, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.' 13 The tax collector, however, stood far off and would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, be merciful to me, sinner that I am!' 14 I tell you that this man went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

The Pharisee did not understand he was a sinner, while the tax man did. Because the tax man admitted his status, and asked for forgiveness, he became justified.

## John

The gospel (historical account) of Jesus by John is academically interesting as many claim that John teaches one must only believe in Jesus to be saved. However, I suggest, that the only way to come to this claim is to delete a vast number of words that John wrote. If we refrain from redacting uncomfortable scriptures, we discover John teaches what all the other gospels teach, 'To have redemption, we must bring fruit in accordance with repentance'.

### John 3

John 3:16 is likely the most famous verse in the Bible, and certainly the most famous in terms of God's salvation plan. However, it is also likely the most misunderstood text. If one only read John 3:16, one might believe that to be saved, one must only believe, and that only once. However, the Greek tenses argue differently. And we must look at the entire discourse, not one single statement in a line of reasoning, to obtain the full picture.

*John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

*John 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."*

Here is it wise to ask what does 'believes in Him' mean? Believe that He existed? Do we simply believe in any Jesus, including the fakes, or a specific Jesus? *The* Jesus, in whom we are to believe, did something specific. We are to believe in this one. See below:

*John 3:16 For this is the way (referencing the lifted serpent) God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who (continually) believes in him will not perish but (continually) have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him. 18 The one who (continually) believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.*

First we submit that God loved the world by lifting up his Son like the serpent in the wilderness. See Numbers 21:6-9 for the historical account.

Second, we emphasize that the verb 'believe' occurs in the present continuous tense. Those who continually believe will continually have eternal life. All the occurrences of the verb 'to believe' in the gospel of John dealing with salvation occur in the present continual tense. 'Believe in Him' is decidedly *not* a one-time event.

If, driving down the road, I obey the speed limit once, and then every time after that drive too fast, am I obedient to the authorities because I was obedience just once? It is obvious that I am not. If I believe once, and then discontinue, am I still a believer? Obviously not.

Continuing on, and we have seen this verse before, 'believing' is not the final stop, for:

*John 12:44 But Jesus shouted out, "The one who believes in me does not believe in me, but in the one who sent me, 45 and the one who sees me sees the one who sent me. 46 I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness.*

Believing *must* move the believer into the light. It is illogical to claim that Jesus came as a light to shine in the darkness so that we could remain in darkness. If Jesus wanted us to remain in darkness, why then come as light? We mention these obvious things only for the reason that some teach that one can 'believe in Him', remain in darkness (continue with evil deeds), but nonetheless have the life that comes only with the light, even though, by the nature of being in darkness, he does not come to the light. If that sounded convoluted, you are correct. This teaching is convoluted.

Moving forward with truth, and we have seen this before, but it bears repeating:

*John 3:19-21 Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God.*

This text is often overlooked in terms of God's plan of salvation. This text mirrors 1 John examined prior. This stands to reason, for the authors are the same. Those who continue to practice dark deeds, stay in the darkness (remain of the devil), whereas those who practice the truth (good deeds) come to the light so that their deeds in God may become exposed.

## **John 5**

*John 5:24-27 I tell you the solemn truth, the one who hears my message and believes the one who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the solemn truth, a time is coming - and is now here - when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, thus he has granted the Son to have life in himself, and he has granted the Son authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.*

Here, Jesus is referring to the rapture where the dead in Christ come alive again. I say this because during the rapture, only those who are in Christ, dead or alive, will hear his voice, and live. This is contrasted with John 5: 28-30 below.

Jesus is also alluding to His death and resurrection, for God has given Him life (such that He cannot remain in the grave).

Furthermore, God has granted this Jesus authority to execute judgement. The Judge has clearly articulated how He will judge in John 3:19-21. The 'hearing the message' and 'believing the one' resulting in 'eternal life' assumes that the believer has moved into the light, with the good deeds following; for as we have discussed from John chapter 3 and 12, believers must follow this route in accordance with his message.

The fact is, all deeds will be judged, either here or there, now or later. Before this mortal body perishes, we have the chance to willingly come to the light to have our deeds judged for what they are. If we do this, our sins are forgiven via the punishment put on Jesus prior to His death. If not, then we must carry the penalty ourselves at the final judgement, for Jesus will not die again.

*John 5:28-30 Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out - the ones who have done what is good to the resurrection resulting in life, and the ones who have done what is evil to the resurrection resulting in condemnation. I can do nothing on my own initiative. Just as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of the one who sent me.*

This is the final call to judgement as in Revelations 20:11-15. In this case *all* will hear his voice and come out, some to life, some to death. Again, to make in unmistakeable: those who do good works receive life, while those who have done evil enter into condemnation. This parallels Romans 2:6-8 exactly.

## **John 6**

*John 6:53-55 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.*

## **John 8**

A woman, caught in adultery, was staged to be stoned. At the end, the accusers left.

*John 8:9 Now when they heard this, they began to drift away one at a time, starting with the older ones, until Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus stood up straight and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She replied, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."*

Jesus, who came to free us from sin, asks us to stay away from it.

## **Galatians**

*Galatians 1:6-10 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel – not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! I As we have said before, and now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell! Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ!*

Strong words are exchanged concerning a different, distorted gospel. What might a distortion be?

*Galatians 3:29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise.*

*Galatians 4:7 So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if you are a son, then you are also an heir through God.*

*Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge your flesh ...*

*Galatians 5:16-18 But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

The Church in Galatia were then using their 'freedom' to indulge in the flesh. Paul teaches that there is a difference to being led by the Spirit and led by the flesh.

*Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!*

Paul, speaking to believers, warns them that those who practice such things are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. Do we see that? those heirs who were lined up to inherit, do not inherit. He did not say that because they believed, they can live in sin and still inherit the kingdom. This is the perverted gospel Paul was dealing with.

*Galatians 5:22-25 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit.*

The fruits that God is looking for are defined here.

## Colossians

*Colossians 1:3 We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints. 5 Your faith and love have arisen from the hope laid up for you in heaven, which you have heard about in the message of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. Just as in the entire world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, so it has also been bearing fruit and growing among you from the first day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.*

*Colossians 1:9 For this reason we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects – bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God,*

*Colossians 1:21 And you were at one time strangers and enemies in your minds as expressed through your evil deeds, 22 but now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death to present you holy, without blemish, and blameless before him – 23 if indeed you remain in the faith, established and firm, without shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.*

## James 2

*James 2:18-26 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith without works and I will show you faith by my works. You believe that God is one; well and good. Even the*

*demons believe that - and tremble with fear. But would you like evidence, you empty fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? You see that his faith was working together with his works and his faith was perfected by works. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Now Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And similarly, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*

In handling the 'salvation by faith or works' discussions, James argues that both are required. Faith without works is useless, it is dead. Faith is perfected by works. Since salvation is through faith, then salvation requires some works. Presumably these works are the 'fruits of repentance' as seen in the Gospel books.

This argument is only logical. If I tell my employer that I believe that I can do good work, but never get around to doing it, at some point, he will call me out as a liar.

If one believes that Jesus did die for our sin, and cleansed us from sin - because He does not want us stained -, it is then only natural to repent thereof, and turn away from it. If Jesus has made us alive to perform good works, at some point, we have to get around to performing good works.

From James' text, we understand that he is correcting a false teaching. The false teaching is this: 'faith has effect without accompanying works', and 'one can be justified by believing only'. The true apostles of our age are battling this teaching as well. The devil has not given up spreading false teachings.

## **2 Peter 3**

*2 Peter 3:9-13 The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; when it comes, the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze, and the earth and every deed done on it will be laid bare. Since all these things are to melt away in this manner, what sort of people must we be, conducting our lives in holiness and godliness, while waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? Because of this day, the heavens will be burned up and dissolve, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze! But, according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness truly resides.*

Peter is straightforward in contrasting those who perish and those who repent. Repenters do not perish. Peter then encourages us, in view of the coming day of God, to conduct our lives in holiness and godliness. And what resides in the new heavens and the new earth? Righteousness?

The concept that one can simply believe, live in sin and avoid perishing is contrary to Peter's understanding of truth.

## **Revelations**

*Revelation 2:5 Therefore, remember from what high state you have fallen and repent! Do the deeds you did at the first; if not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place - that is, if you do not repent.*

Speaking to believers, Jesus demands that they repent. If not, they will be removed. This can have only one meaning.

*Revelation 3:3 Therefore, remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come against you.*

Again, speaking to believers, Jesus warns that he will come *against* those who do not repent.

*Revelation 9:20-21 The rest of humanity, who had not been killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so that they did not stop worshiping demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk about. Furthermore, they did not repent of their murders, of their magic spells, of their sexual immorality, or of their stealing.*

The non-repentant did not stop their sin. It is impossible to stop sinning without first admitting that it is wrong.

*Revelation 16:8-11 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was permitted to scorch people with fire. Thus people were scorched by the terrible heat, yet they blasphemed the name of God, who has ruling authority over these plagues, and they would not repent and give him glory. Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast so that darkness covered his kingdom, and people began to bite their tongues because of their pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their sufferings and because of their sores, but nevertheless they still refused to repent of their deeds.*

In a foretaste of hell, the unrepentant are burned because they refused to repent.

Revelations 20:12 Judgement by works

## Grace and Works

We turn the corner on the plan of salvation to emphasize that while obedience to the faith requires good works, those good works do not save us. This may appear to be a contradiction, but it is in reality not.

*Acts 15:11* On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are.

*Ephesians 2:8* For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast.

While we are certainly saved by grace, but not just any grace.

*Colossians 1:6* ... Just as in the entire world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, so it has also been bearing fruit and growing among you from the first day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

We are saved by the *grace of God in truth*. And this is where the rub is. There are many different types of grace, but only one in truth.

We find the some resist promoting 'good deeds', because that might indicate that one is 'saved by works'. However, this pretext, is exactly that, a pretext. It is an excuse not to come to the light, so that their deeds might not be judged. At the same time, they sooth their consciences thinking they have eternal life, for they 'believe'. But one wonders how they get eternal life when they run from the light, which is life, for the light emanates from life. One also wonders which 'gospel' they have believed. For the true 'gospel' requires the proof of 'good works'. Let us continue.

### Titus 2

Titus chapter 2 begins with specific teachings for young and old, for male and female. Then he teaches on 'grace'. It is highly important to correctly understand grace in terms of salvation. An improper understanding of grace leads one through the 'broad gate' and onto the 'spacious way'.

*Titus 2:1* But as for you, communicate the behavior that goes with sound teaching.

*Titus 2:2* Older men (same word as for 'elders', male version) are to be temperate, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.

*Titus 2:3-5* Older women (same word as for 'elders', female version) likewise are to exhibit behavior fitting for those who are holy, not slandering, not slaves to excessive drinking, but teaching what is good. In this way they will train the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, fulfilling their duties at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the message of God may not be discredited.

*Titus 2:6-8* Encourage younger men likewise to be self-controlled, showing yourself to be an example of good works in every way. In your teaching show integrity, dignity, and a sound message that cannot be criticized, so that any opponent will be at a loss, because he has nothing evil to say about us.

*Titus 2:9-10 Slaves are to be subject to their own masters in everything, to do what is wanted and not talk back, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, in order to bring credit to the teaching of God our Savior in everything.*

The point is that we should live in such a way that leads people to Christ. The author tells us why in the following text:

*Titus 2:11-14 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 as we wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good. So communicate these things with the sort of exhortation or rebuke that carries full authority. Don't let anyone look down on you.*

Highlighting grace, we have:

- 1) grace has appeared (in reference to Jesus); grace comes in the form of Jesus
- 2) grace brings salvation
- 3) grace instructs us
  - a. to deny ungodliness and worldly desires
  - b. to live sensibly, righteously and godly
  - c. as we await for the fulfillment of our hope

If we are in fact saved by grace, and this grace instructs us to live this way, then let it be so!

We have covered the why in terms of grace. Now Paul tells us the why in terms of Jesus:

Jesus Christ gave himself:

- 1) to set us free from every kind of lawlessness
- 2) to purify us for himself a people that are truly his
  - a. eager to do good

Going back to the beginning of this study, Jesus' mission is to save us from sin. If this grace saves us from sin, then it is only logical that those who believe in Him, and by extension His mission, do their best to refrain from sin. Only a twisted and deceived mind could claim that grace does not call us to godliness.

Either He has purified us, or He has not. If not, then we do not belong to Him, for He purifies all who belong to Him, for that is his mission.

Paul closes out this teaching to Titus to communicate these things and rebuke with full authority, just as he did in the first chapter.

When we look at this text, Paul was writing this teaching to Titus in response to false teachings. The false teaching is this: salvation by grace does not require living holy.

### Titus 3

*Titus 3:4-7 But “when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior. 7 And so, since we have been justified by his grace, we become heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life.”*

We are justified by his grace, the same grace that instructs us to deny ungodliness, etc. This grace brings us eternal life.

It is interesting to note: Paul highlights that our works do not save us. Denying ungodliness and performing good deeds do not, in themselves, save us. However, this should *not* be understood as saying, Jesus will not eternally condemn people on account of their evil deeds. God will not allow us to use grace as a license of sin, turning him into a fool.

*Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived. God will not be made a fool. For a person will reap what he sows, because the person who sows to his own flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.*

Those who believe they can sow evil and reap righteousness will not be made the fool. These who teach and live such things have deceived themselves. We covered this in the first book of John at length.

*Titus 3:8 This saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on such truths, so that those who have placed their faith in God may be intent on engaging in good works. These things are good and beneficial for all people.*

Those who place their faith in God must be intent on engaging in good works. This is a parallel to:

*John 12:46 I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness.*

Placing faith in God and coming to the light must be followed with good deeds.

Paul provides practical advice on engaging in good works:

*Titus 3:13-14 Make every effort to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; make sure they have what they need. Here is another way that our people can learn to engage in good works to meet pressing needs and so not be unfruitful.*

## Ephesians 2

*Ephesians 2:1 And although you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you formerly lived according to this world's present path, according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest.*

We lived according to the the flesh and devil's energy. We were children of wrath. We lived for evil works.

*Ephesians 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, 5 even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you are saved! 6 and he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.*

Why were we created? For good works! We are his workmanship towards this end. We must, however, be transferred from death into life to do the good works. The dead produce only dead works. As a matter of fact, when we are dead, we cannot bring good deeds. By his grace we were made alive so that we perform good works.

This is a concept that has been turned upside down by the devil. Most people teach that good deeds have nothing to do with salvation. The power of this lie is that it is a half-truth. The false teaching says, works do not get us saved, therefore, good deeds are immaterial for salvation. The truth is, grace brings us to life so that we are able perform good deeds.

However, good deeds are the automatic result of being saved; it is the mark of being saved. If we have not good works, then we are not being saved.

## 2 Thessalonians I

The Thessalonians were victims of persecution.

*2 Thessalonians 1:5 This is evidence of God's righteous judgment, to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which in fact you are suffering. 6 For it is right for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to you who are being afflicted to give rest together with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. 8 With flaming fire he will mete out punishment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will undergo the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his strength,*

The end of those who disobey the gospel is eternal destruction.

*2 Thessalonians 5:10-12 when he comes to be glorified among his saints and admired on that day among all who have believed - and you did in fact believe our testimony. And in this regard we pray for you always, that our God will make you worthy of his calling and fulfill by his power your every desire for goodness and every work of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Again, the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ, for those who have believed:

- 1) makes us worthy of His calling
- 2) fulfill every desire for goodness and every 'work of faith'

We hope that it is becoming clear that those who truly believe live a life worthy of the calling, and have a desire for goodness and every 'work of faith'. Here we emphasize that 'faith' requires work'. James chapter 2, discussed before, expounds on this point.

## Romans 6

Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? **Are we to remain in sin so that grace may increase?** 2 Absolutely not! **How can we who died to sin still live in it?** 3 Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:5 For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection. 6 We know that our old man was crucified with him **so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.** 7 (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.)

Romans 6:8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he is never going to die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 For the death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 **So you too consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

Romans 6:12 **Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires, 13 and do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no mastery over you, because you are not under law but under grace.**

Romans 6:15 What then? **Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Absolutely not!** 16 **Do you not know that if you present yourselves as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or obedience resulting in righteousness?** 17 But thanks be to God that though **you were slaves to sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching you were entrusted to,** 18 **and having been freed from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness.** 19 (I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.) For just as **you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.** 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with regard to righteousness.

Romans 6:21 **So what benefit did you then reap from those things that you are now ashamed of? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now, freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your benefit leading to sanctification, and the end is eternal life. 23 For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

The short commentary is that the apex of this chapter on the struggle between doing right and doing wrong is found in 6:11. We should consider ourselves dead to sin so that we do not fulfill its desires.

## **Conclusion**

One might be saved from water by pulling a person out of a drowning situation. When we are saved from sin, it is expected that we are indeed pulled out of it. Daily, we struggle against the flesh. We are to consider it dead so that we do not fulfill its desires.

To get to life, we pass through the narrow gate. We also have to walk the narrow road. Both are a requirement to get to life.

While it is true that we get through the narrow gate through an initial repentance and faith in Christ, our daily walk on the narrow road must be in faith and produce fruit of repentance.

If our works are done in the darkness, we have to wonder if we are in the light.. If we look at our lives and do not see fruits of repentance, we have to question whether we are in the faith.

Above all things, Jesus came to save us from sinning against God.