



Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths. . . and walk therein”
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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20 THINGS TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT ROMANS 10:9-10

Jason Patrick Hilburn

Many today could be described in this way: they love God and are very zealous, but they lack knowledge of how God’s Word harmonizes regarding salvation, or they refuse to acknowledge the Truth. Because of this, they have created their own system of righteousness that is different from God’s.

Romans can be a difficult book to understand. Even Peter said some of Paul’s writings are difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:15-18), but one should not get discouraged like those of John 6:66. Be like Peter, who persevered (John 6:67-68). Sadly, **Romans 10:9-10 has been misunderstood or twisted by untold numbers of people.** Some seem to think this is the only passage in the Bible telling man how to be saved, and many have interpreted this confession to be “the sinner’s prayer.” Those who believe such are strongly encouraged to study further. This article presents some thoughts to encourage an honest, objective, study of Romans 10 and its relation to man’s salvation. It is highly recommended to read Romans chapter 10 in its entirety before reading the following points.

1. The epistle to the Romans was written to Christians, not alien sinners who had never been saved (Rom. 1:7-8), so there was no need for Paul to go into great detail to teach them how to become Christians, although he would address that subject briefly. Note that these Christians would need to *continue confessing* their faith in Christ

before men.

2. Paul had already shown the necessity of baptism in chapter 6 before he wrote chapter 10, and the honest reader of Romans 10 will not discard that Truth to take a position that contradicts other passages (Luke 8:15; 2 Tim. 2:15-18). Paul said these Romans had already been “*baptized into Jesus Christ...into his death*” where Jesus’ blood is contacted and where they were “*then made free from sin*” (Rom. 6:3-5, 16-18; cf. John 19:33-34; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 1:5). Paul said we bury the person who is dead in sin and is raised to new life, “*through faith in the working of God*” (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:11-13; Titus 3:5; cf. John 3:5; Gal. 3:26-27). He said “*if*” we have done this, “*we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Rom. 6:5). One cannot be saved outside of Christ (Rom. 8:1; 2 Tim. 2:10). Paul taught that one is not “*in Christ*” until he is “*baptized into Christ*” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).

3. The confession of Romans 10 is a confession of faith before men, not a prayer, and certainly not a prayer to Jesus, because Jesus said to ask Him “*nothing*” in prayer (John 16:23; Matt. 10:32; Mark 8:38). Romans 10:9 is

the same kind of confession to men that Jesus mentioned as an essential step for salvation (Matt. 10:32-33) — the confession of the Truth upon which the church was built (Matt. 16:16) — the confession men made before being baptized to wash away their sins (Acts 8:37-39). It is the good confession that Timothy made before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12-13). It is also the same kind of confession that many Jews were unwilling to make (Matt. 26:74; John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and that is apparently why Paul emphasized this particular requirement for salvation in Romans 10:9-10.

4. The verses surrounding Romans 10:9-10 clearly indicate that Paul was focusing on the Jews in that context (10:1-8, 12, 16-21). In fact, chapter 9 and much of chapter 11 also deal primarily with the Jews, many of whom did not believe in Christ or were ashamed to confess faith in Jesus before men. When reading Romans 10:9, think of Jews who were ashamed to confess Christ. That does not mean they did not have to repent or be baptized to be saved like the Jews on

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20 Things...



Editorial...

SAVED BY WORKS

Garland M. Robinson

***Salvation is not by grace only or faith only.
Salvation is also by works — the works God
commands both sinners and saints to do.***

Ephesians 2:8-9 is well known and quoted by many: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* These words are also often misunderstood; and, misapplied. Many are quick to latch on to the phrase: *“not of works.”* They do so completely ignoring the point being made in the context. All they see is “works” and immediately they are blind to the rest.

The false system of Calvinism (which is followed by masses of people) teaches that works have absolutely nothing to do with being saved. They say salvation is by the grace of God and no works are involved — period. In fact, they emphasize it even further by sometimes saying sinners are saved by “grace alone.” However, they don’t understand the relationship between grace and works. The entirety of the Scriptures tells us of both. They fail to see there are different “kinds” of works, some having nothing to do with salvation and some that have everything to do with salvation. Let’s look at all the Bible says on this topic.

It is not true, in fact it’s false, that salvation is by “**grace alone**” or “**grace only**.” That flies in the face of everything the scriptures teach. For example, Titus 2:11 says: *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.”* If “grace alone” saves, then everyone will be saved because God’s grace is for “all” men. The word “alone” means there is nothing more involved — everything else is excluded — “grace alone” excludes “faith.” But these same people claim that sinners must **believe** — have faith in Jesus to be saved. So, if belief is necessary to be saved, then there is something else in addition to

grace! At the very least they will have to admit that salvation is by grace plus faith. Actually, Jesus tells us that even “faith” is a work (John 6:29) — something man must do.

Multitudes also say that salvation is by “**faith alone**.” But they run into the same problem as those who say salvation is by “grace alone.” They can’t support it! They can’t show where the Bible teaches that in the Scriptures. Faith alone excludes grace. Grace alone excludes faith. Who believes that? They can’t have it both ways: “grace alone” and “faith alone.” Which is it? Is salvation by “grace alone” OR “faith alone?” If salvation is by grace alone, then it can’t be by faith alone — and vice versa. If it’s by faith, then it can’t be by grace; and, if it’s by grace, then it can’t be by faith.

Salvation is not by anything “alone” or by itself. There are many things involved in a sinner being saved. God has a part and man has a part. That is God’s plan, not man’s plan. God does not force salvation on anyone. It’s our choice if we desire to be saved from our sins. If we have to choose (and we do), then there is something we have to do. The fact that men must choose, is something man does! Many are stuck on the idea that if man must do something to be saved, then that is a work, and Ephesians 2:9 says we’re not saved by works. They stop right there and will examine it no further and therefore remain in their sins.

The Holy Spirit said: *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15). The problem with the doctrine of “grace alone” and “faith alone” is that men fail to “rightly divide the word of truth.” They have made up their mind regarding what

they believe and then go to the Bible in order to find something that will support their belief. They have the order backwards.

Our mind should be a “clean slate” — open, with no preconceived ideas. THEN we go to the Bible and rightly divided it, use it correctly, handle it properly, understand what “it” says; not what we want it to say. The Bible does not contradict itself. Every passage supports and blends with all other passages. When we make a statement in one verse conflict with a statement in another verse, we’ve missed the point — we don’t understand. We have misunderstood one of the statements; or, we have misunderstood both. The Scriptures are in perfect harmony. All the verses fit and compliment each other. It’s our job to dig and find the harmony in God’s will.

So, what does the Bible say about works? The Holy Spirit inspired James to write that **Abraham was justified by works** (James 2:21) and that **Rahab was justified by works** (James 2:25). As a result, many have made the claim that the book of James should not be in the Bible and should be discarded! They accept Romans because “they” like it but reject James because “they” don’t like it. So, they rip it out of their Bible and convince others to do the same. They are like king Jehoiakim of Judah when Jeremiah’s scroll was read to him. He did not like what God said — *“...he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire...”* (Jeremiah 36). Cutting out parts of the Bible you don’t like doesn’t make it go away! Stern warning is given by God to any who “add to” His word or “take from” from His word (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-10).

Abraham and Rahab were justified by works. That’s what the Bible plainly says. Justified means to be right, acceptable, before God. Both were right in God’s eyes because their faith was proven by their works (James 2:18). But, it was not by “faith only.” Their faith was acceptable WHEN they worked — WHEN they obeyed. Men can have faith all day long; but, as long as they sit back and do not act (work, obey) they will remain in their sins and will be lost. Their faith is useless, dead, barren, of no value.

Faith without works (obedience) is as dead and useless as it can be.

Notice the words of the Holy Spirit: James 2:17, *“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”* James 2:20, *“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”* James 2:22, *“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”* James 2:24, *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”* James 2:26, *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”*

In the book of Romans (chapters 4-5), Paul speaks of “faith” being essential to be saved. In the book of James (chapter 2), we read about “works” being essential in salvation. James is in perfect harmony with Paul. They compliment each other. Paul speaks of the necessity of faith and James speaks of the necessity of works. They do not conflict. Both are correct. Neither of them emphasize faith or works to the exclusion of the other. Man puts the word “only” at the end of faith — “faith only.” That is not what God says. Nor does he say that we are saved by works “only.”

Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). But, that can also be said of works — without works it is impossible to please God (James 2:20). One can believe and trust God with all their heart — as genuine and well meaning as he can be. But unless his faith is proven by his works (obedience), faith is useless (James 2:18,22). Likewise, one can work (obey God) with all their energy and might, but without faith, it is useless.

Faith and works go hand in hand. One is no good without the other. Jesus said, *“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say”* (Luke 6:46)? *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven”* (Matt. 7:21). Jesus only saves those who obey him (Heb. 5:9; Matt. 7:21). If “faith only” is true, then Hebrews 5:9 would say Jesus is the author of salvation to those who “do not” obey him. Doing, obeying, is the work that God demands we do (John 6:29). Peter told thousands on the day of Pentecost, *“save yourselves”* (Acts 2:40). Sinners save themselves by believing and obeying what God commands them to do.

Paul emphasizes faith and James emphasizes works. Both are true.

Paul tells HOW one is made right before God — by faith.

James tells WHEN one is made right before God — by works (obedience).

Abraham was justified by faith WHEN (not before) he had offered Isaac (James 2:21).

Rahab was justified by faith WHEN (not before) she received the messengers and sent them out another way (James 2:25).

Hebrews chapter 11 says the same thing about faith and works. It gives examples of those who were right in God’s eyes. In every instance it is WHEN they acted (worked, obeyed). Notice these action verbs: Abel *offered* (v.4), Enoch *pleased* (v.5), Noah *prepared* (v.7), Abraham *obeyed* (v.8), *so-journed* (v.9), *looked* (v.10), *offered* (v.17), etc. etc. All these people were moved by their faith in God to DO what he commanded them to do. They did not sit back with folded hands and say “I can be saved by faith alone.”

Do you have enough faith in the Lord to do what he commands?

SEVERAL KINDS OF WORKS

Everything man does is a “work” — an action. We read of several “kinds” of works in the New Testament. There are:

(1) **Works of man’s “righteousness”** wherein he glories/trusts (Titus 3:5; Luke 18:11-14; Rom. 4:2). They are works wherein one may boast (Eph. 2:9). These works do not save (Matt. 7:22-23).

(2) **Works of the Law of Moses** (Gal. 2:16). They do not, and can not save (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20,28).

(3) **Works that are evil** (John 7:7; Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11; Col. 1:21; Titus 1:16). They obviously do not save.

(4) **Works of the flesh** (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Wickedness, ungodliness condemns us. They don’t save.

(5) **Works of God** (Acts 2:11). These are works God does.

(6) **Works of obedience** that God commands man to do (John 6:28-29; James 2:14-27; Matt. 7:21). These are not man’s works, they are God’s works. These are works God commands man to DO in OBEDIENCE to Him (Matt. 10:32; 12:50; 18:3; 25:21; Mark 9:47; Luke 6:46; Heb. 13:21; James 1:22; 2:22; 1 Peter 4:2; 1 John 2:17; 1 John 3:22,24; Rev. 22:14).

The works that save are the works God commands us to obey. But, salvation is not by “works only,” just as salvation is not by “faith only.” There are many things involved in one’s salvation. On God’s part there is his love (John 3:16), grace (Titus 2:11), the sacrifice of his Son (Heb. 2:9), mercy (Luke 1:78), Jesus’ blood (Eph. 1:7), forgiveness (Acts 5:31), etc. etc. On man’s part there is faith (Rom. 3:25), repentance (Acts 17:30), confession (Rom. 10:9), baptism (Acts 2:38), works (James 2:24), obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22), living faithful (Rev. 2:10), worshipping in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24), etc. etc.

What kind of works do not save? Works wherein man may boast. Works that God did not authorize.

What kinds of works do save? The works God commands us to do. Sinners can’t be saved without faith toward God AND obedience to His word. God only saves those who OBEY him (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:9).

If you were given a check for a million dollars, it is worthless if you just look at it. You have to do something (act, work). You have to take it to the bank and cash it. The one who gave it to you did their part; now, you have to do your part.

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20 Things...

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Pentecost, or like Paul himself! (Acts 2:38-41; 22:16; cf. Rom. 6:3-5). Saul/Paul was still mourning his sins and fasting until he was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 9:18-19; 22:16).

5. Romans 10:11 proves that Paul emphasized confession so people (especially Jews) would not be ashamed to confess Christ before men: *“For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed”* (10:11; cf. Matt. 10:32-33; Mark 8:38; John 12:42). In fact, that was Paul’s point at the end of chapter 9 also, when speaking of Israel’s reluctance: *“Israel...whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed”* (9:31,33). This context must be considered to understand Romans 10:9-10! Paul was quoting Isaiah 28:16, which says, *“...he that believeth shall not make haste,”* meaning he will not be ashamed or afraid, running away in fear.

6. The Bible often uses a figure of speech called a synecdoche, in which a concise statement is used to represent something more complex. Romans 10:9 is a concise figure of speech used to emphasize something that was sorely needed: people (especially Jews) who were not ashamed to publicly proclaim their faith in Jesus.

7. If someone does not believe, the teacher will focus on the necessity of belief (John 3:12-16). If someone already believes, but still needs to change, the teacher will likely focus on repentance and may not even mention belief (Acts 2:38). In Romans 10:9, the focus is on belief and confession, because of the Jews’ common reluctance to do so. Imagine someone saying, *“If you would just be willing to confess Christ, you could be saved!”* That does not mean that confession is the only thing involved. It’s a figure of speech. Their refusal to publicly confess Jesus was the main hindrance to their salvation, thus the emphasis.

8. To take Romans 10:9 and say that confession is required, but baptism is not, is like taking First Peter 3:21 and saying baptism is required, but confession is not. Both statements are false, because *“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God”* and we must learn how to *“rightly divide”* God’s Word, believing every bit of it (Psa. 119:160, 172; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17).

9. Repentance is not mentioned at all in Romans 10, but surely nobody rules out repentance as being required for salvation (Matt. 4:17; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; 17:30, 31; 26:20; 2 Peter 3:9; cf. Luke 13:3,5; 2 Cor. 7:10). If one believes that repentance is required because God said so in other passages, he should also believe baptism is required, because God said so in other passages (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 9:6; 10:6, 35, 48; 19:5; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-5, 16-18; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 5:26; Col. 2:11-13; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:22; 1 Peter 3:20-21). If repentance is required, so is baptism. Although neither repentance nor baptism are explicitly mentioned in Romans 10, but they are both implied.

10. It is also inconsistent to say man is saved by “faith alone,” while also requiring the act of confession (cf. James 2:24). Confession is an active command one carries out himself, while being baptized is a passive action, requiring something done to the person by someone else. This very passage (Rom. 10) contradicts the doctrine of “faith only” salvation, requiring more than faith alone, and the entire Book of Romans emphasizes obedience to Christ, not just belief (Rom. 1:5; 2:6-11; 4:12; 6:1-22; 8:1-13; 10:16,21; 12:1-2; 13:1, 13, 14; 16:26). The Book of Romans, like many of Paul’s writings, was written to prove that men, whether Jews or Gentiles, could only be saved through obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ — not by works of “the law” [of Moses] (Rom. 1:16; 2:17, 28-29; 6:1-6, 16-18; 7:4-7; 8:1-4; 9:2-8, 31-32; 10:1-3; Gal. 2:15-16; 3:19-29; 5:3-6; Eph. 2:8-16; Col. 2:14-17; etc.).

11. It would be erroneous to claim that the confession of Romans 10:9-10 is “the sinner’s prayer.” Acts 8:12-24 shows that baptism takes place before prayer (cf. Prov. 28:9; John 9:31; 1 Peter 3:12). Prayer is a spiritual blessing for those in Christ (Eph. 1:3), and one is not in Christ until he is *“baptized into Christ”* (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3). As has already been shown, interpreting the confession of Romans 10:9-10 as a prayer does not fit the context, and **one will not find any conversion in the Bible of an alien sinner living under the New Covenant who was commanded to pray to be saved.**

12. What is seen is a confession of faith to men that takes place before baptism: *“Philip...preached unto him*

Jesus...and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:35-37; cf. 1 Tim. 6:12). By the way, **the Ethiopian rejoiced after baptism, not after his confession**, because his sins were washed away in baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:39; 22:16). That is why he urgently wanted to get to the water, because when Philip *“preached Jesus,”* he preached the necessity of believing and being baptized for salvation (cf. Acts 8:5,12, 35-39; Mark 16:15-16).

13. One must confess his belief before he is baptized into Christ, because Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16). Others do not know you believe, unless you *“confess with thy mouth”* (Rom. 10:9). That is surely why Philip required a confession of faith from the Ethiopian before baptism in Acts 8, and that confession was not a prayer. Please note that **Jesus did not say, “He that believeth and prays the sinner’s prayer shall be saved.” He said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”** (Mark 16:16).

14. Romans 10:10 is elaborating on 10:9, thus the *“for”* at the beginning of the verse. The phrases *“unto righteousness”* and *“unto salvation”* in Romans 10:10 are synonymous, meaning *“towards salvation.”* This is not translated correctly in translations such as the ESV, NIV, or NLT. The first phrase in 10:10 cannot literally mean that one is saved at the point he believes, because that would contradict the second phrase about *“confession unto salvation.”* Is he declared righteous (saved) at the point of belief, or at the point of confession? They are both *“towards”* salvation, but salvation is not actually obtained until one *“calls on the name of the Lord”* by being baptized in the name of the Lord (10:13; cf. Acts 2:21, 38; 22:16). The Romans 10 confession is made before one *“appeals to the authority of the Lord”* by being baptized in the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13; cf. Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21, 38; 8:37; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Strong’s Greek Lexicon says that *“calling on”* means *“to appeal,”* and *“name”* can mean *“authority”* (cf. Acts 4:7; 25:11, 12, 21, 25; 26:32; 28:19). This pattern of confession before bap-

We “call on the name of the Lord” (appeal to His authority) to be saved when we are baptized to be saved Acts 2:21; 2:38; 22:16; cf. 1 Peter 3:20-21).	
Acts 2:21	Acts 2:38
“...whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved ”	“...Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins... ”

tism is exemplified in the conversion of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:35-39; cf. Rom. 10:9-13).

15. A study of the following three passages proves that one calls on the name of the Lord when he is baptized in the name of the Lord: **Acts 2:21, 2:38, and 22:16**. Acts 2:38 explains what Peter meant in Acts 2:21 — call on His name by being baptized in His name (His authority, Acts 4:7).

In Acts 22:16, the phrase “calling on the name of the Lord” is a participial phrase describing what Saul was doing when he arose, was baptized, and washed away his sins in the name of the Lord. Men do not have the power (authority) to save themselves, so they must appeal to the authority of Jesus by doing what the Author of salvation authorized for salvation (Matt. 4:17; 10:32; 28:18-20; Mark 16:16; Heb. 5:9). Water baptism is how the penitent believer calls on (appeals to) the Lord to be saved, because that is what Jesus commanded for man’s salvation (Mark 16:16; John 3:5). First Peter 3:21 also says water baptism is how one appeals to God for a good conscience, salvation.

16. When the whole book of Romans is examined, it is clear that one believes unto (towards) righteousness, confesses unto (towards) salvation, and is finally “baptized into Jesus Christ” to be “made free from sin” (Rom. 6:3, 17-18; 10:10,13). Note that repentance is also “unto” eternal life (Acts 11:18), and baptism is “unto” the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). The Greek preposition *eis* is the same word used in all these passages, translated as “unto” in Romans 10:10, so if belief and confession are unto salvation, so are repentance and baptism, with baptism being the final step “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).

17. In Romans 10:15, Paul mentions preachers being “sent” to “preach the Gospel,” and in 10:18 he goes on to say, “...*Yes verily, their sound went*

into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.” This is obviously referring to the Great Commission in which Jesus commanded baptism for the salvation of all people and did not mention confession (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38-40). In fact, there are many more verses in the New Testament stating the necessity of water baptism than there are for confession, but God only has to say something once for it to be eternally binding. The Great Commission began on Pentecost, the day the apostles first taught people to call on the name of the Lord by being baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21, 38-41; cf. Rom. 10:12-18).

18. What is being discussed in Romans 10 is summarized by this statement: “*But they have not all obeyed the Gospel*” (10:16). The basic facts of the Gospel are the death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4). So how does one obey that? Paul already told us in Romans 6 — a penitent believer must be baptized into His death, buried with Him in baptism, and raised to walk in a new life (6:3-5). When we “*obey from the heart that form of doctrine*” we have “obeyed the Gospel” and are “*then made free from sin*” (6:16-18; 10:16). The Christians in Rome would have understood that “obeying the Gospel” was just another way to describe being baptized into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Those who do not obey the Gospel will be separated from God eternally (2 Thess. 1:7-9; 1 Peter 4:17).

19. In Romans 10:17 Paul says, “*faith cometh by hearing...the Word of God,*” so those who do not believe what God said about the necessity of repentance and water baptism cannot be people of true faith. A person of faith will believe everything God said (Psalm 119:172; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17).

20. A primary rule of Biblical interpretation is that any interpretation

of a passage that contradicts other passages is incorrect (Psalm 119:160, 172). Immediate and remote contexts must be considered for a proper understanding. When discussing something as important as Heaven and Hell, it is the height of irresponsibility to take one or two verses as “proof texts” while ignoring or trying to explain away the rest of the Bible. It is extremely dangerous to precious souls when one wields God’s Powerful Sword so recklessly (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; James 3:1). Peter warned it is quite possible to take more difficult Scriptures, like those written by Paul, and twist them to our own destruction. He thus commanded growth in knowledge (2 Peter 3:15-18). Love for others and our own souls would demand that we be honest with God’s Word, being careful with it, studying it diligently, knowing that the way we use it can save or condemn.

Conclusion: In Romans 10, Paul had expressed his desire for Israel to be saved. Even though they had a zeal for God, it was without proper knowledge: “*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*” (Rom. 10:1-3). Many today could be described in the same way: they love God and are very zealous, but they lack knowledge of how God’s Word harmonizes regarding salvation, or they refuse to acknowledge the Truth. Because of this, they have created their own system of righteousness that is different from God’s. May we lovingly encourage them to reconsider and submit to the righteousness of God, “*that they might be saved*” (Rom. 10:1; cf. Acts 19:1-5; Rom. 6:16-18; 16:17; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 4:16).

Note: If anyone reading this believes I am in error, let me know. Show me from God’s Word how I am wrong, and I will consider your words as they relate to the Bible. I just want to do whatever God wants (Psa. 141:5; Prov. 27:5-6).

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IDOLS THAT AFFECT MAN'S SERVICE TO GOD

James W. Boyd

Many think of idols only in terms of images (they are included). However, that is not the whole story. Pagan religions, Romanism and others have physical and mental images. Many have self as an idol. To make what a person wants, likes, and pleases him first in life is sinful.

An idol is anything that we set before, alongside, or instead of, the true and living God of heaven. Idolatry is giving allegiance to anything before God. Idolatry is repeatedly and severely condemned in the Bible. “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3) is a theme throughout Scripture. Possibly many think of idols only in terms of images, and that is included. But that is not the whole story. Pagan religions, Romanism and others have physical and mental images.

Making images differs from making images as religious symbols. One may have an image of baby feet to express opposition to abortion. That is not like some “relic” of a “saint.” Kissing the toe of Peter’s stature, St. Christopher on the dashboard, using the brazen serpent as an idol is not like having lions at the entrance of the driveway or a horse at the barn. The image of Buddha is not like a family snapshot. A totem pole is not the equivalent to grandpa’s picture.

Scripture condemns making any image an object of worship. Likewise, worship of the sun, moon or stars is idolatry. To bow down, kiss, or show adoration and homage to such things is idolatry as ancient as history. But still, some people let their lives be governed by such things.

That which can be made an idol is not necessarily evil in itself. Paul teaches idols are nothing (1 Cor. 8:4). For this reason eating meat offered to idols is not necessarily sinful. The brazen serpent that became an idol was not sinful in its first use. Many have self as an idol. That does not make being a person is evil. But it is sad when anybody adopts the attitude, “Not Thy will but mine be done.” To make what a person wants, likes, and pleases him first in life is wrong. If I become my own standard maker, my own authority, I become my own god. When I am self-willed I put self first

before God and others (2 Peter 2:10). Paul speaks of those who are lovers of self more than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:4). This is the “do-your-own-thing” crowd (Judges 17:6). Scripture leaves no doubt that self is man’s number one idol.

Modernism, humanism, relative subjectivism and liberalism are nothing other than replacing God. “Man is the most” is the cry of these idolaters. They contend there is no right or wrong, truth or error, just be honest, unity in diversity, no law, no absolutes. But who decides what is honest under such a system?

They deny Christianity, the pre-existence of Christ before Bethlehem, His Deity, the virgin birth, the immortality of the soul, even the existence of the soul, the inspiration of the Bible, judgment, heaven, hell, sin and salvation. Instead, **they worship human wisdom, “scholarship,” degreers, so-called science and the elite.** Their vocabulary is deceitful because they use words like God, Deity, inspiration, truth, love, salvation, etc. but not as the Bible presents them. Baptism, moral purity, sacredness of human life, the law regarding marriage is set aside. Then you get the sinner’s prayer, situation ethics, the worship of trees and animals as being equal or superior to man.

ORIGIN OF SUCH DOCTRINES

These ideas are coming from theologians, professors, schools, clergymen, the “experts.” They simply reject what they do not want, with the wave of their superior hand they dismiss God’s will as irrelevant, unconvincing and illogical. Without evidence they dismiss truth, logic, consistency, but assert they know best. There is no way to set God aside more certainly than to set aside His Word. Things that interfere with what God says, are idols. God declares worship, good steward-

ship, family responsibilities, morality, are important. Idolatry confuses priorities.

MAMMON

One rather obvious god is mammon — money, material things. Paul warns against the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10). This love causes people to lie, steal, cheat, murder, sell the body and soul, create war. This is so evident in our world. Money is not evil in itself. It depends on one’s attitude toward it — manner of acquisition and distribution. Many have adopted the false premise that having money means success. The “dog-eat-dog” operation goes forward. The Golden Rule is buried. Get all you can and can all you get. Jesus said, “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Matt. 6:24). We are taught to mortify covetousness (Col. 3:5). Some think, “What’s yours is mine if I can take it.” But our profession is being a Christian. Even our jobs are to pay the bills as we serve Christ.

FAME AND INDULGENCE

To be in the limelight is the ambition of so many. Jesus said the greatest would be servant of all. Some loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43). Ego, pride, the desire to be recognized and applauded is the goal of many. Diotrophes had that disposition (3 John 9). “My name in lights,” is so important to celebrities. Some are so proud they can strut sitting down. They will compromise truth to get fame. They lack self-esteem, self-worth and have a serious sense of inferiority.

Alongside that goes the desire to satisfy the flesh with every indulgence,

seeking pleasure (Heb. 11:25), obsessed with physical appearance, lustful, living riotously in revelry, having a “good” time in drunkenness. This is the prime mission in life according to some.

We must also realize that innocent things can become idols when they come between us and God. Sports, hobbies, jobs, vacations, fall into this category. While not evil in themselves,

they become evil because they are first.

DO WE MAKE MEN OUR IDOLS?

Peter would not let Cornelius even appear to worship him (Acts 10:26). Herod met tragedy when he allowed himself to be presented as a god (Acts 12:21-23). Paul and Barnabas were mistaken as gods (Acts 14:8-18). Popes,

ancestors, family, religious leaders, Elvis are gods to many. But the bottom line is that God has not (does not or will not) surrender His throne nor share first place with any. We must always be as Paul taught the Thessalonians to turn from idols to serve the living and true God.

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A GOOD CONFESSION

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In 1 Timothy 6:13 Paul said that Jesus, “before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.” The confession is found in Matthew 27:11: “Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest” (See also Mark 15:2 and Luke 23:3)

John goes into more detail (John 18:29-38). Pilate asked Jesus, “Art thou king of the Jews?” Jesus replied with a question, “Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it to thee of me?” With that question, Jesus put Pilate on trial. As governor, Pilate would have to decide whether to render his own judgment concerning Jesus, or to capitulate to the Jew making the accusation out of envy. Matthew 27:18 says of Pilate, “He knew that for envy they had delivered him.” Pilate knew this was not a political matter for him to deal with, but a religious dispute of the Jews. He had already said, “Take ye him and judge him according to your law,” but the Jews wanted Jesus put to death. Pilate said to Jesus, “Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done” (John 18:35). Jesus said to Pilate, “my kingdom is not of this world” (v.36). Pilate understood. The kingdom of heaven was spiritual in nature. It did not pose a threat to civil governments acting within their civil authorities. If it did, then Jesus would be guilty of insurrection under Roman law, but Pilate said, “I find no fault in him at all” (v.38).

Jesus had already made this good confession before the high priest. Ananias said to Jesus, “I adjure thee by

the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said” (Matt. 26:63-64). There is no question what Jesus meant by his answer. As a Jewish idiom, it was an emphatic way to answer in the affirmative, much as we may say, “You said it!” To what was perhaps a non-Jewish audience Mark interpreted the answer, “The high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am” (Mark 14:61-62). We can dismiss the bold and uninformed affirmation some make that Jesus never claimed to be the Christ.

When Paul wrote of the “good confession” he was talking about the one Jesus made before Pilate, rather than Ananias. It was the same confession, but before the high priest, it was preliminary; before the governor, his confession would mean his crucifixion, and still, Jesus “witnessed a good confession.”

Jesus expects us confess the same concerning him. In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” In Acts 8:36-37 we read, “They came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Some dismiss this confession because they do not find it in their new Bible versions, but the

translators of their new Bibles are not so quick to dismiss it. The ones I have consulted include a reference to the confession in a footnote. It is not a translation issue, but a text issue. The newer versions are translations of a newer text derived from a small family of older manuscripts. The older Bibles are translations of an older text derived from a large family of later manuscripts.

The manuscripts are not the only witness. In the year AD 180 Irenaeus wrote that the believing eunuch said to Philip, “I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God.” In the year AD 250 Cyprian wrote, “In the Acts of the Apostles: Lo, here is water; what is there which hinders me from being baptized? Then Philip said, If you believe with all your heart you may.” Both of these New Testament quotations are older than the oldest New Testament manuscripts.

Paul wrote, in Romans 10:9-10, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” The confession in Romans 10:9 is a “one time” (aorist tense) confession. The confession in Romans 10:10 is a “continuous” (present tense) confession. We make the good confession before we are baptized, and we continue to make the good confession after we are raised to walk in newness of life.

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