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C0535 – 9/14/2005 – The Terms of Salvation
Believe and Implore God to Save?

I. Where We've Been

- Depravity: Man's Problem
- Grace: God's Solution
- Faith: Man's Responsibility
- Believe and Repent?
- Believe and Be Baptized?
- Believe and Confess Christ or Sin?

II. Where We're Going

Once we get through dispelling these myths and concluding that it is faith alone then we want to answer the question "What is Faith?" You may think, "Oh, that's so easy, everyone knows what faith is." Really? If everyone knows what faith is then why are there lots of different answers to the question? We'll see that, once again, Satan has caused confusion over the term "faith" so that people remain confused about whether they had the right kind of faith or enough faith to be saved. Such confusions lead to a lack of assurance of salvation. And lack of assurance leads to instability and failure. God wants you to know you are saved so you can enjoy stability but Satan wants you to doubt you are saved so he can toss you about (Eph 4:14-15).

After we answer the question "What is faith?" I want to take you on a journey through three plans of salvation.

1. The Biblical Plan of Salvation
2. The Roman Catholic Plan of Salvation
3. The Lordship Plan of Salvation

We want to see what each plan teaches and how we here at Fredericksburg Bible Church can detect errors and re-direct people to the biblical plan of salvation.

III. Where We are Today

Today we must cover the question “Do I have to believe and implore God to save me?” By imploring God, we mean, “Don’t I need to “seek the Lord” and ‘pray’ for Him to save me?” This seems quite reasonable from the human side. For example, “How can I find the Lord if I do not seek Him? How can I find what I am not looking for? And how is God supposed to know to save me if I do not pray for Him to save me? This surely seems reasonable. Yet both of these claims strike a destructive blow to divine grace. Paul said,

Romans 11:6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

grace + any human work = destruction of grace (Rom 11:6)

Both of these requirements (praying and seeking the Lord) ignore the overwhelming scriptural testimony of faith alone in Christ alone as the sole condition for eternal life, which condition is mentioned more than 150 times.¹ According to this same great theologian, Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, said faith is not a work, but is the opposite of works.

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

Calvinists have it in their mind that if a man has faith then man has brought something to the equation and by doing so has destroyed grace.

grace + any human work = destruction of grace (Rom 11:6)

That is, they think of faith as a human work. They then conceive the idea that God must first regenerate a person implanting the seed of faith. But that is an unnecessary and unscriptural deduction. Paul explicitly denies that faith is a work! And so, it is not necessary to make faith the gift of God implanted in regeneration. Many Calvinists quote Eph. 2:8-9 to support the idea that faith is the gift of God. What is the Gift of God in:

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Though many Calvinists say that faith is the gift of God here even John Calvin denied that view. He said...

“...in what way do men receive that salvation which is offered to them by the hand of God? The answer is, *by faith*; and hence he concludes that nothing connected with it is our own. If, on the part of God, it is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but faith, which strips us of all commendation, it follows that salvation does not come from us... Faith, then, brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ.”ⁱⁱ

Surprising to many, Calvin said that Eph 2:8-9 does not teach that faith is the gift of God. Instead, “He does not say that faith is the gift of God; but to be saved by faith, this is the gift of God.”ⁱⁱⁱ Interestingly, my exegesis of these verses had the same result as Calvin when I taught the Book of Ephesians (cf. <http://www.fgbible.org/Ephesians.htm> Eph 2:8-10 “The Gift of God”). If faith is not a work but rather the opposite of works then faith is in accordance with grace and need not be the gift of God. “Such a view does not preclude the notion that for faith to save, the Spirit of God must initiate the conversion process.”^{iv} And this teaching Paul proclaims boldly when he says,

Romans 4:16 For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace,

Justification is by grace through faith. Foolish is the man who thinks grace alone results in justification. A man must believe in order to be justified. Equally foolish is the man who thinks faith causes justification. Faith has never justified anyone. Only God justifies and he does so when a man exercises faith. This means the man is credited with righteousness, a righteousness that does not come from himself but from Christ. It does not make a man righteous; rather it credits Christ’s righteousness to the sinner’s account. At such a time and forevermore the sinner is looked upon as righteous because God looks at the sinner’s account and sees the righteousness of Christ.

Thus, divine grace is the basis of salvation and faith is the means through which a man is justified by God. Thus, a man cannot be required to pray to God or to seek the Lord in order to be saved. Those who have fallen into this trap have yet to see even the plainest

things in Scripture; removing their eyes from Christ and placing them on their prayers and own seeking only turns them away from the only solution to the sin predicament.

IV. Believe and Pray (Luke 18:13)

Virtually every so-called gospel tract concludes with a “sinner’s prayer”. After the evangelist explains the tract he comes to this prayer and says, “Now, do you want to pray this prayer and be saved.” Many who have shared the gospel have elicited a prayer from the victim and then went off assuming that this person was now saved. How many times I have done this I cannot even remember. It is marked down as a victory for Christ. But was it? Just what is it that a person must do to be saved? Is it saying that prayer that saved them? I have always found it odd that people say you must pray in order to be saved yet prayer is talking to God and faith comes by hearing the word of God. How many people do you know who can listen while they’re jaw is yapping? I know none. So, it makes no sense to say that prayer results in salvation. We ought to pray a prayer of thanks after being saved!

Further, many people have prayed at some time. Does this mean that all who have prayed are saved or even that God listens to all prayers? Scripture indicates that only the prayer of a righteous man is heard (Prov 15:29; Js 5:16).^v Thus, only those who are already justified by faith have their prayers heard by God. How then can prayer be a condition for being justified?

If prayer be necessary for justification then we must wonder whether Jesus Christ’s sacrifice satisfied God or not. Has God been satisfied by His only begotten Son? Or is there yet more to satisfy? Does the prayer of an unbeliever soften the heart of God and move Him to be gracious and thus to save? How deplorable a thought. To say that one must pray is to say that Christ has not satisfied the Father fully and something more is needed. But that is a virtual denial that Christ’s sacrifice alone is a sufficient basis for salvation, whether the person is conscious of this denial or not. The Bible says God is infinitely satisfied by His Son. That is, God is propitiated, meaning “God is satisfied”. Thus, God is ready to save, not if you soften his heart with prayer, but if you will believe. God is no more prepared to save when sinners pray to Him than when they do not. In fact, He is detested whenever someone deprecates the value of His Son’s work by thinking that there is something they must bring to the equation. Did Christ or did He not satisfy all the Father’s righteous demands? If He did then there is no need to pray to God to save but only to believe in Christ as Savior. Surely that is enough to result in the free bestowal of salvation and every spiritual blessing. And such is what Scripture abundantly proclaims.

Acts 16:31 "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,"

The Bible nowhere says "Pray to the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." The Bible says Jesus Christ alone is the Propitiator and has completely satisfied the Father's righteous demands, turning away His wrath. Thus, all one must do is believe.

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

1 John 2:2 He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

Propitiation is directed toward God and was made in the Son's death on the cross. This work of Christ met the Father's righteous demands. If God's righteous demands were not satisfied then the wrath of God would abide upon all men.

The verse usually called upon to support the idea that a man must beg God to save them is the tax collector's prayer of Luke 18:13.

Luke 18:13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

This parable was told to those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:" (Luke 18:9). The Pharisee's were a highly respected group of elders in Israel. This Pharisee, like many others, was self-righteous. They thought of others as sinners, like this tax collector. On the other hand, the "tax collector" thought only of himself as a sinner (v 13; "the sinner"). The Pharisee's prayer reveals his self-righteous nature. He reviewed all his great attributes. The tax collector's prayer reveals his humble nature. It is a universal truth that one characterized by self-righteousness is not justified whereas one characterized by humility is justified. The passage is giving a verbal picture to characterize the two types of Jews: unjustified and justified. Yet many have wrongly construed from this that the tax collector's prayer was the basis of his being justified.

First, we must look at the tax collector's prayer; "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." However, the original Greek does not say "merciful" (*eleos*) but "satisfied" (*hilaskomai*). It should read, "God, be satisfied to me, the sinner!" The theological word is "propitiation"

which simply means “to be satisfied”. The tax collector is praying that God would provide satisfaction for him. The Pharisee thought his own righteousness would please God. But the tax collector recognized that only God would have to provide satisfaction for him. He is not praying that God would be merciful or lenient toward his sin. God can never be lenient toward sin. Rather, His justice must be satisfied. Thus, he is praying that God would provide satisfaction for him.

Second, it must be remembered that this prayer was offered *before* the cross during the dispensation of the Law. This means that the satisfaction had not yet been provided. However, the publican’s prayer was answered in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. After the cross this prayer has no relevancy whatsoever because God is already satisfied. If one prayed that God would be propitiated today it would be asking for something Christ already provided and would serve as a rejection of what He provided. God is propitiated. Someone who puts forth the tax collector’s prayer as the plan of salvation “has yet to comprehend what is the first principle in the plan of salvation through Christ. Men are not saved by asking God to be good, or merciful, or propitious; they are saved when they believe God has been good and merciful enough to provide a propitiating Savior.”^{vi} When the next verse says , “this man went down to his house justified” it must be remembered that Jesus is giving a verbal picture of the characteristics of two types of Jews: unjustified and justified. This would have stunned Jesus’ disciples because the Pharisees were considered the epitome of righteousness and the tax collectors were considered the epitome of unrighteousness.

V. Believe and Seek the Lord (Isa 55:6)

The idea that one must “seek the Lord” is a second glaring error that destroys grace.^{vii} A popular passage used to support the idea that we must seek the Lord as a condition for salvation is...

Isaiah 55:6 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

This verse is talking about the time when the Messiah was near. When was the Messiah near? When He came to earth. Thus, during that time the nation of Israel was supposed to seek the Lord and call upon Him. If they would the earthly kingdom would come. As a nation, they did not. This verse is not written *to* the Church but *for* our learning. A second verse is

Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

This verse is within Jesus' instructions on prayer and is given to his disciples. It is already assumed in these verses that God is their Father (7:11). Three things are laid down here as conditions for answered prayer; 1) ask. If you don't ask God won't answer (cf Js 4:2). 2) seek. This refers to taking action. You can't just pray and then do nothing. For example, you may pray that God would give you an understanding of Scripture, but 2 Tim 2:15 insists that you must also diligently work at handling Scripture accurately. Peter tells us that one must be taught the Scripture so he doesn't develop destructive beliefs (2 Pt 3:16). Further, Christ has provided teachers in His universal body for the purpose of teaching Scripture but this must be balanced with the fact that one must still depend upon the Holy Spirit for understanding what is taught (2 Cor 2:14). So, one must ask but one must also actively study, be taught, and depend on the Spirit. 3) "knock" which refers to "persistence". To get our prayers answered we must 1) ask, 2) actively seek for an answer, and 3) be persistent. It could be translated, "keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking". I think I have shown that this verse has nothing to do with "seeking the Lord" as a condition for salvation. Instead, it is a condition for receiving answered prayer. I also want you to see how terribly a person can distort Scripture by taking it out of context.

The message for both Jew and Gentile is found in Rom 3:11.

Romans 3:11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

In this and every age, none seek after God. This is a quotation from, Ps 14:1-3 where God looked down among the sons of men to see if there were any who understood, to see if there were any who seek God and He found ZERO. In Acts 17:26-27 we find that God set up optimal conditions for man to seek Him.

Acts 17:26-27 and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

God determined the time in history *when* a man would live and *where* a man would live for the purpose that mankind would seek God. In other words, God set up optimal conditions for mankind to seek Him, if perhaps they might find Him. But even under

optimal conditions men do not seek God. Does it follow that just because God designed everything so that unbelievers would “seek Him” that they have the ability to seek Him? This is often where people get confused. Does a stated requirement imply ability to fulfill the requirement? By way of example let’s assume the High School track coach says “Anyone can be on the track team if he can run two miles under 12 minutes.” Does that mean that everyone has the ability to run two miles under 12 minutes? No, of course not. But everyone who can run two miles under 12 minutes can be on the track team. So, just because God wants people to seek Him does not mean that they can or will. In fact, the Bible tells us that no one has ever sought God (Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Rom 3:11). But God is not to blame. Man is held responsible for not seeking Him. God designed everything to be in favor of us seeking Him (Acts 17:27). So, the resolution to this dilemma rests in the fact that there is something in man that prohibits him from seeking God. It’s the sin nature and that’s what Romans 3 is all about. So, any time you hear of or think an unbeliever is “seeking God”, what he’s really doing is seeking *a* god, not *the* God. No one is seeking *the* God. All men are seeking *a* god after their own image, *a* god of their own making, *a* god of their own imagination, *a* god to serve their self-interests.^{viii}

What is very interesting about this discussion is that all men already know God.

Romans 1:18-21 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

If they know God clearly, and God says they do, what is the problem? The problem is in verse 18, men suppress the truth; they hold it down. So, they know the truth about God and they suppress it. Verse 21 gives the first result of this suppression, “they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Something automatically happens to the mind when known truth is suppressed, and the thing that happens is the reasoning processes in the mind become futile. The mind begins to speculate; develop alternative worldviews that are the imaginations of men’s hearts. These speculative worldviews are attempts to remove their God-consciousness which is eating away at their conscience. See, Ecclesiastes tells us,

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has also set *eternity* in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which *God* has done from the beginning even to the end.

What does it mean that God “set eternity in their heart”? It means God placed a longing in their heart, a yearning for an explanation, a longing for a cosmology that accounts for everything from the beginning to the end. And yet God did this “so that man will not find out the work which God has done.” What is Solomon talking about? He’s saying that this yearning, this desire is in all of our hearts but that we will never figure it out on our own. If we start with ourselves and autonomous human reason we will end in speculation, not in true discovery of what God has done from beginning to the end. So, unbelievers are not seeking God at all, they already know about God but they are running the other way. They don’t like that answer, they want another explanation.

How then does an unbeliever ever find God? No unbeliever ever has, God finds them. It is not God that is lost it is man that is lost. God doesn’t need to be found; unbelievers already know Him. It’s man that needs to be found. No unbeliever is seeking the one true God. A good picture of this is Adam and Eve after the Fall. Did Adam and Eve go looking for God? No, God came looking for them and had to “call” them out from hiding. Unless God does this man is not going to come to Christ (John 6:44). Men desire to remain hidden from God, covering up their sin by their own devices (fig leaves/works, etc.). God didn’t force Adam and Eve to come out from hiding. God never forces someone to come to Him against his/her will. Instead, He both makes them willing and able to come (monergism before salvation...synergism at the point of salvation. the synergism depends wholly upon the monergism).

IV. Review

Tonight, we’ve seen that it is not required that a man implore God to save. The very claim that a man must implore God to save implies that God is not satisfied and that something must be added to Christ’s work in order to soften God’s heart and move Him to save us. Before the cross the tax collector prayed that God would provide satisfaction for him and that prayer was answered in Jesus Christ. After the cross such a prayer is detestable because it rejects God’s Son as a full propitiation. Now God is propitiated and this means He is ready to save if only men will believe in the Saviorhood of Christ! The sinner’s prayer is not a requirement for salvation.

Next, we learned that no man seeks God even though God commands men to seek Him and sets up optimal conditions for man to seek Him. It is not in man to seek after *the* God, instead, man, because he is depraved seeks after a god made in his image, a god to serve

his self-interests, a god who is all love and no justice. Such is the god of many supposedly Christian denominations these days. But it is not God who is lost and man who is seeking Him. It is man who is lost and God who is seeking Him. The problem is depraved men are running the other direction; they don't want to be found until God makes them willing. God sends wake up calls in people's lives; near death experiences, loss of a loved one, sickness, catastrophe, and in particular blessing...and yet man continues to blame God for the bad ("How can a good god let this happen to me") and gives himself credit for the good ("look what I did"). He does not seek God; he does not honor God. He honors himself, is proud of himself, operates on his own steam, makes

ⁱ 58 passages condition salvation on "faith" alone; Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20; 7:50; Acts 14:27; 15:9; 24:24; 26:18; Rom 1:5; 1:17; 3:22; 3:26, 27, 28, 30, 31; 4:5, 9, 11, 13, 4:14, 16; 5:1, 2; 9:30, 32; 10:6, 17; 11:20; 16:26; 1 Cor 2:5; 15:14, 17; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 22, 24, 26; 6:10; Eph 2:8; 4:5; Phil 3:9; Col 2:12; 2 Thes. 2:13; 3:2; 2 Tim 3:15; Heb 4:2; 10:39; 1 Pt 1:5, 9; 2 Pt 1:1; 1 John 5:4; 140 passages condition salvation on "belief" alone; Luke 8:12; 12:46; John 1:7, 12; 2:23; 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 4:39, 41, 42, 48; 5:24, 38; 6:29, 30, 36, 40, 47, 64, 69; 7:5, 31, 38, 39, 48; 8:24, 8:30, 31; 9:35, 36, 38; 10:25, 26, 37, 38, 42; 11:25, 26, 27, 40, 42, 45, 48; 12:11, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 44, 46; 13:19; 16:9; 17:8, 20, 21; 19:35; 20:31; Acts 2:44; 4:4, 32; 5:14; 8:12, 13, 37; 9:42; 10:43; 11:17, 21; 13:12, 39, 48; 14:1, 2, 23; 15:5, 7, 11; 16:1, 31, 34; 17:12; 34; 18:8, 27; 19:2, 4, 18; 21:20, 25; 22:19; 28:24; Rom 1:16; 3:3, 22; 4:3, 5, 11, 17, 18, 24; 9:33; 10:4, 11, 14, 16; 11:20, 23; 13:11; 1 Cor 1:21; 14:22; 15:2, 11; 2 Cor 4:4; Gal 2:16; 3:6, 9, 22; Eph 1:13, 19; 1 Thes. 4:14; 2 Thes. 1:10; 2:12; 1 Tim 1:16; 4:3, 12; 2 Tim 1:12; Jas 2:23; 1 Pt 1:8-9, 21; 2:6, 7; 1 John 3:23; 5:1, 5, 10, 13; Jude 1:5

ⁱⁱ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol XXI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 227.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol XXI* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), footnote 1, 227-228.

^{iv} Wallace, Daniel B., *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 335.

^v God has answered the prayer of an unbeliever on occasion but only to fulfill His sovereign purposes.

^{vi} L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology Vol 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1993), 392.

^{vii} Today we have an entire movement sweeping across America and the world known as the "Seeker-Sensitive" or "Seeker Friendly" or "Vineyard" Movement. This movement began in the early 1980's with John Wimber. This movement is based on several false beliefs, one of which is the idea that lost people are seeking God. Their entire church vision is built on this premise. This movement is considered the "third wave" of charismatism and has lead thousands of Christians into eastern mysticism and Gnosticism. For any Christian who has discernment, and there are few left who do, it is easy to recognize this as a satanic deception.

^{viii} This is not to say that man does not have God-consciousness. He certainly does. All men know God clearly through creation and conscience (Rom 1:20; 2:14-15). It is simply that man is suppressing this truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). He constantly expends energy to avoid or explain away God. He is far from seeking Him. He does just the opposite, he hides from Him.

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