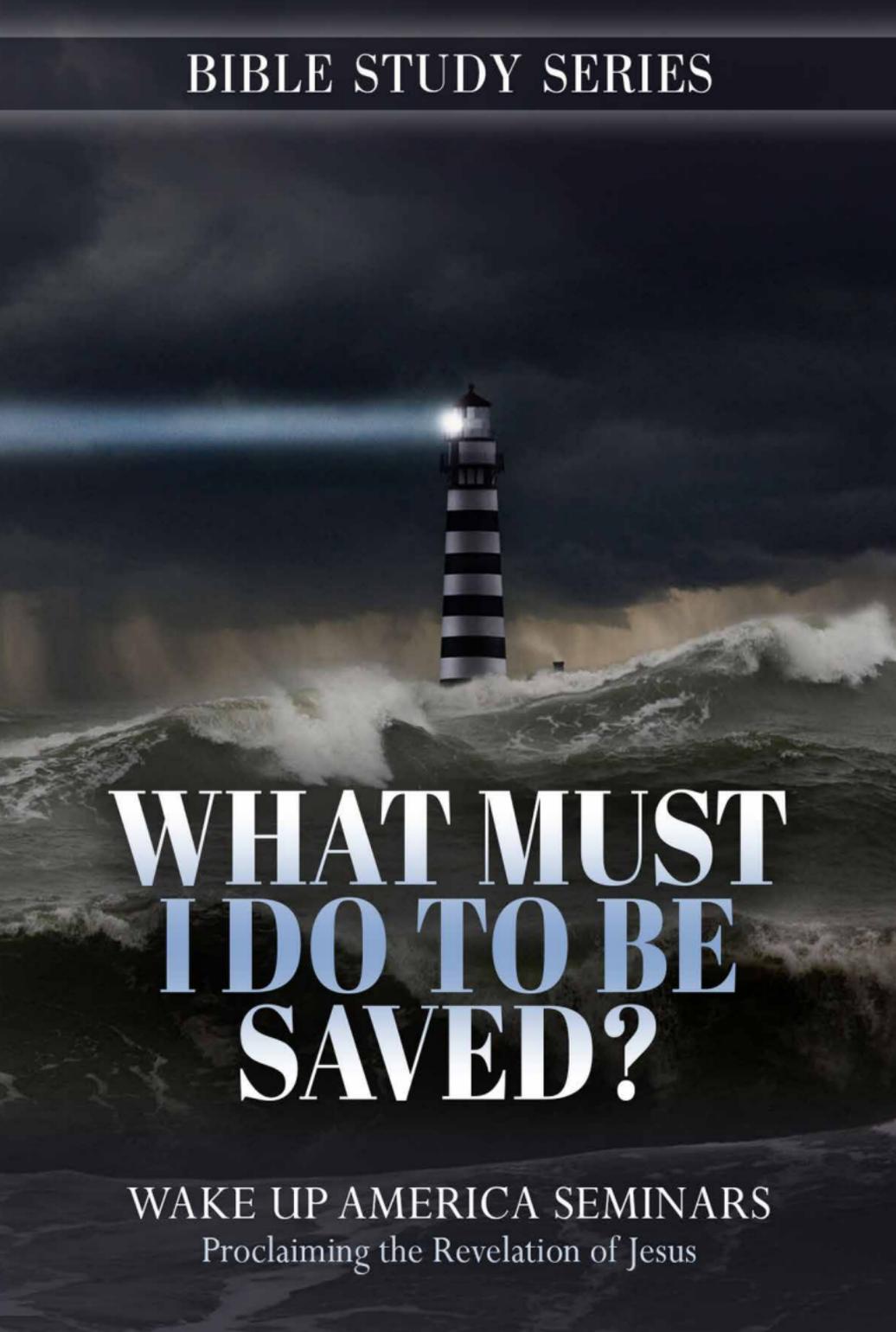


BIBLE STUDY SERIES



**WHAT MUST
I DO TO BE
SAVED?**

WAKE UP AMERICA SEMINARS

Proclaiming the Revelation of Jesus

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Larry Wilson

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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

The subject of God's salvation is an overwhelming topic to present. What elements should be given first? What dimensions should be explored? What perspectives should be demonstrated? Do you want a basic introduction to salvation or an advanced presentation?

These are not simple questions. Therefore, to introduce the topic and to make salvation easy to understand, here are seven statements that parallel essential aspects of salvation. I will refine these statements next with analogies for those who already have a basic understanding of salvation.

Salvation is Like:

- Being born on a train headed for Auschwitz but rescued from death by a merciful stranger
- Being the only survivor of a plane crash
- Winning the lottery
- Losing your home and all possessions
- Achieving complete remission after a fight with terminal cancer
- Being an innocent victim of violence
- Receiving a heart transplant

Headed for Auschwitz

Suppose a baby was born en route to Auschwitz during WWII. The infant could not realize or understand his destiny. Nevertheless, the train's destination and the fate of those arriving in Auschwitz were certain. Everyone born on this planet is *on a train* that will reach an inevitable end—whether we believe it or not. The future is not death which is common to all people, for the first death is not the end of human existence. The Bible speaks of two resurrections—a resurrection for the righteous and a resurrection for the wicked.¹

At the end, each person on Earth will meet God face to face.² This is every man's destiny.³ God will explain to each person why He judged them worthy of eternal life or death. I parallel salvation to being rescued from the train because God's offer of salvation is our only option other than eternal destruction. We are sinners headed for eternal death. The Bible says, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**⁴

1 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 20:5; John 5:29

2 2 Corinthians 5:10

3 Revelation 20:12

4 Romans 6:23

Everyone is born under the curse of sin. We sin because we inherited a sinful nature. All sinners are condemned to eternal death. Paul wrote, **“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”**¹ However, Jesus has rescued us from eternal death. **“For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus Christ] the many [who receive Him] will be made righteous.”**²

Surviving a Plane Crash

A commercial airliner careens into the side of a mountain. All 223 passengers perish but one. This illustration parallels salvation because God saves one person at a time. He does not save nations, churches, friends, family, children, or spouses.³ Salvation is singular—very personal. Salvation is a matter between God and *you*.⁴ Do not be misled by religious culture or security. Joining a church cannot save you. On the other hand, a church can offer social and spiritual encouragement.

1 Romans 5:12

2 Romans 5:19, insertions mine

3 Ezekiel 14:12–20

4 John 3:16

No man can save another from eternal death or grant eternal life. Jesus told Nicodemus, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”**¹ Rebirth is a divine miracle. Spiritual rebirth is a transformation of the heart that only God can perform. This miracle cannot be duplicated or fabricated, nor does it happen on man’s terms.

In other words, man cannot make himself *born again*. Man cannot choose to be born again whenever he wants. Only God can perform the miracle of rebirth, and when He gives us the opportunity, we must submit to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. If we surrender, we will be reborn. If we repeatedly refuse the Holy Spirit, He may not give us another opportunity. **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”**²

Winning the Lottery

It seems everyone has imagined the joy of winning the lottery. Obtaining much for so little strongly appeals to our human nature. In a way, salvation is like that. Receiving and experiencing salvation is like winning the lottery. Paul wrote, **“I con-**

¹ John 3:3

² Hebrews 4:7

sider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”¹ “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.”² Indeed, even if one won all the money in the world, it still would not compare to the riches that await the saints. Jesus said, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?**”³**

What God offers is so great compared to what He asks. Sinners gain much for so little. To know God is an experience beyond anything this world can offer. To walk with God is a joy beyond anything this world can provide. To spend eternity with God will be an incredible prize beyond any lottery.

Losing Home and Possessions

Salvation parallels the experience of having your home and possessions destroyed because when God’s offer of salvation comes to a person, the issue of surrendering everything to God becomes para-

1 Romans 8:18

2 Philippians 3:8

3 Matthew 16:26

mount. God says, “Give me your heart, affections, loyalty, will, and obedience, and I will give you my salvation.” Usually, God’s offer is juxtaposed between social approval and social confrontation.¹ If we submit to God, it sometimes appears that we will lose all that we have worked for—status, position within the community, fame, money, power, and friends. If we accept God’s offer of salvation, we give Him our life, career, and possessions. This is an excellent test of faith. This is why salvation is like losing everything we own in a tragedy—for those who receive salvation yield all they possess to God’s control.

If our love for Jesus is greater than family, houses, and possessions, and we accept His offer of salvation, His reward is amazing. Jesus said, **“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”**² Jesus also said, **“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”**³ What a deal!

1 Luke 18:18–25

2 Mathew 10:37

3 Matthew 19:29

Overcoming Cancer

A diagnosis of cancer is often a death sentence. In some cases, people can overcome the ravages of cancer and live to talk about it. Cancer parallels salvation in that all human beings have the cancer of sin. We have sinful natures from birth. However, Jesus empowers us to overcome the cancer of sin. We can be changed into new creatures. The Bible describes this experience as being born again.¹ Even though we are morally frail and spiritually feeble, the *chemotherapy* of Christ's righteousness can transform a sickly mortal into a healthy person illustrating God's ideal for humanity.

Overcoming the cancer of sin is not only possible but also necessary. Jesus said, **"To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne."**² John explains how we can overcome sin, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."**³ If we admit our sins, Christ will forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness. Jesus takes the love

1 John 3

2 Revelation 3:21

3 1 John 1:9

for sin out of our hearts so that we might be pure in heart.

An Innocent Victim

We often hear of an innocent person killed in some violent way. Innocent children are abducted, sexually molested, and then killed. A friend of mine was innocently gunned down through his front door by midnight visitors who had the wrong address for a bad drug deal. News headlines report daily that innocent people are killed in drive-by shootings. An innocent victim parallels salvation in two ways: First, Adam and Eve passed their sinful nature and its curse to their innocent offspring. Cain became a murderer. It is only a matter of time until an innocent child willfully sins, and the curse of sin is perpetuated. Second, God's offer of salvation is based on a process where the guilt of one person's sin can be transferred to another, provided the receiver is a sinless substitute. Jesus, the innocent, sinless Son of God, died in our place. God allows Jesus' innocent sacrifice to pay the penalty of sin for any person *if* that person is willing to submit to the terms and conditions of salvation.

Jesus was the innocent Lamb of God. Through Jesus' sacrifice, the Father silenced every argument

that might prevent a person from being saved. John wrote, **“The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ ”**¹ Jesus is called the *Lamb of God*. He was not man’s lamb. Christ died for us when we were God’s enemies: **“For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”**²

Heart Transplant

When Dr. Christian Bernard performed his first heart transplant in South Africa, he made worldwide headlines. Half a century ago, the idea of replacing a diseased heart with a good heart was heralded as a significant step in medical science. Now that many years have passed, that major step has proven to be a minor one for most people. Many have wonderfully benefited from the miracle of heart transplants. Still, the logistics of finding donors and covering expenses have placed this operation out of reach for most people. Salvation is like a heart transplant in that the carnal nature is replaced with a spiritual nature. Each exchange is no less noteworthy than

¹ John 1:29, insertion mine

² Romans 5:10

Dr. Bernard's first surgery, with an amazing effect on the recipient. Paul described this transformation by saying, **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"**¹ What a person used to love, he now hates. What he used to hate, he now loves! This kind of spiritual transformation only happens through the power of God upon the submissive soul.

God offers a heart transplant to all, but there is a condition: Unconditional surrender to God's will. **"Jesus answered [Nicodemus], 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.'"**² Being born of the Spirit is a divine miracle that happens individually. Parents cannot experience this for their children, and children cannot experience this for their parents. God has no grandchildren. Each person becomes a child of God through rebirth.³ Being born of water means that each child of God should be baptized into Christ. This is a public affirmation, like marriage vows, of an inner transformation and life commitment. Baptism testifies that a person has chosen Christ as their Lord and Master and will go

1 2 Corinthians 5:17

2 John 3:5-6, insertion mine

3 1 John 3:1

wherever Christ leads, **be** all that Christ asks, and **do** all that Christ commands—through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.¹

Not a Life Insurance Policy

Too many people think of salvation in shallow terms. The PLAN of Salvation involves more than saving individuals from eternal death. The PLAN involves the complete restoration and transformation of people. The PLAN ultimately reveals God's righteousness and fairness in dealing with all His creatures.

For some people, God's offer of salvation is little more than a life insurance policy offered through church membership. Somehow, the idea has surfaced that a church and/or its leaders have the authority to *offer* salvation. This is not true. No church or its leaders can save. Jesus saves. Churches and their leaders can only speak of *God's offer* of salvation. In this sense, think of pastors or priests as meteorologists. Meteorologists can only report the weather; they cannot control it.

Salvation is a Multiple-Step Process

Another shallow perspective of salvation is when people speak of *getting saved* as though it were a

¹ Matthew 28:19–20; Philippians 4:13

one-time event. The first transformative step of salvation is a conscious submission to what one knows or believes to be the will of God. When a sinner submits, God reckons that sinner to be a saint.¹ This initial process is called justification. Understand that submission must spring from love. Jesus said, **“Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”**²

Justification is that all-essential wedding garment that God provides.³ Jesus freely offers His righteousness to all willing to serve Him and their neighbor in love because this reflects His selfless character. For example, Mother Theresa was a remarkable 20th-century model of selfless service to God and man. Justification is the all-important process where God freely grants His righteousness to sinners. God’s righteousness is THE essential element for salvation. Paul wrote, **“For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”**⁴

1 Acts 2:38

2 John 14:24

3 Matthew 22:1–14

4 Romans 5:10

In other words, God grants to human beings the righteousness that Jesus revealed during His life on earth. We were reconciled to God by Jesus through His death, but *we are saved through the life of Jesus*. Jesus' death made salvation possible for everyone. But, when I surrender myself to service for God and man, I am granted the righteousness Christ revealed. No one can improve the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness. Justification is not the end of salvation's process. God requires a second transformative step.¹ God changes the sinner's character into that of a saint through sanctification.

Sanctification is like learning difficult music when practicing the piano. One may master a song and then lose that accomplishment by concentrating on other pieces. Sanctification is a lifework that produces spiritual maturity, and the nobility of character is evidence of one's spiritual growth. A selfless life of service brings glory to God if accompanied by the knowledge that it cannot produce salvation. Peter said, **"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."**² Jesus said, **"In the**

¹ John 3; 1 John 2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3

² 1 Peter 2:12

same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”¹ Ten thousand good deeds or acts of obedience cannot produce eternal life. Our deeds can bring glory to God if we do not forget that our good deeds are like filthy rags in God’s sight.²

The Ten Commandments play a vital role in the process of sanctification. They serve as the standard for testing ourselves to see if sanctification is occurring. For example, there is no room for covetousness in the heart of selflessness. Paul wrote, **“Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”**³ James referred to God’s Word as a mirror, showing our actual condition. He said, **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”**⁴ So, the Law of God defines holiness, and our

1 Matthew 5:16

2 Isaiah 64:6

3 Romans 7:7

4 James 1:22–24

pursuit of holiness is called sanctification, but the righteousness necessary for salvation is not gained through sanctification.

Justification and sanctification are both essential for salvation. Sanctification is a daily repetition of justification. In other words, conscious submission to God's will is an everyday experience that will subdue the carnal nature.

Last, glorification is the physical receipt of a new body. Justification occurs by faith. Sanctification occurs through faith, and glorification occurs at God's appointed time. My following comment may sound strange initially, so consider the whole idea before you get too nervous. I believe glorification has been man's hope from the very beginning. Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, and millions of pilgrims that followed, have looked forward to entering God's presence.¹ Glorification is a scheduled event at an appointed time. Those who die before that specific time arrives die without receiving what they have hoped for. **“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting**

¹ Hebrews 11

that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.”¹

When Paul wrote to the believers in Galatia, he looked forward to receiving God’s righteousness saying, **“For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.”²** John knew that glorification was forthcoming. He wrote, **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”³**

Paul wrote, **“I die daily.”⁴** He meant that he had to crucify his selfish will so the Father’s will might be done in his life. Jesus, our example, was subject to the Father in this way. Jesus consciously submitted His will to God in the Garden of Gethsemane. There, Jesus prayed that His Father’s will be done—even if it meant His death.⁵

Outside God’s Will

John says sin is a violation of God’s will.⁶ We are opposed to God’s will in our natural or carnal state.

1 Hebrews 11:13

2 Galatians 5:5

3 1 John 3:2

4 1 Corinthians 15:31, NKJV

5 John 6:38; Matthew 26:42

6 1 John 3:4

In Romans 8, Paul writes: “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.”¹

No Brand Names

God’s offer of salvation is not a big deal to the secular mind. The secular or carnal mind justifies its antagonism against God by looking at a superficial level of spiritual life. For example, everyone can see that different churches offer different terms and conditions for salvation. Therefore, the carnal mind might conclude that Brand X church is no different from Brand Y. Both churches are merely a matter of words and ideas. With every church claiming to be

¹ Romans 8:5–9

the true church, how can a secular person tell a true church from a false one? How does one determine if Brand X is better than Brand Y?

Some churches teach that salvation comes through their church. In other words, if you want to be saved, you must join THAT church and act a certain way. Such notions distort God's purpose for the church. God gave the church for our social and spiritual benefit. He did not create a church to displace the daily experience He wants to have with His creatures. Historically, this point has caused much grief. Since nations were formed, more harm has been imposed upon humanity in God's name than for any other reason. When people conclude their church is the only true church and others disagree, the results are often ugly, especially if the church is politically powerful.

A Fragmented World

Before we consider the elegant and simple way to salvation, understand God's offer of salvation is not limited to one group of people. We speak different languages. We are different colors. We have different religions and separate governments. We have different cultures, even different foods. We The Bible credits God with this fragmentation.

Notice what the Bible says about the language around 120 years after the flood: **“Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.”**¹ As a result of man’s rebellion at the Tower of Babel, God suddenly changed the world’s language into many languages for a particular reason. This purposeful miracle separated people into small groups. People prefer to live and work among those with whom they can communicate. As language groups formed, each one moved away from the unfinished tower to settle in a new territory of the earth. God then did something even more impressive. He pulled the Earth’s landmass apart and formed seven continents. The Bible speaks of this Earth-moving event: **“Two sons were born to Eber: One was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan.”**² There is much evidence indicating that Earth consisted of one land mass. When God divided the Earth, people who spoke one language and lived in one territory were separated from those of other languages residing in different regions. Thus God, in His wisdom and sovereignty, used oceans, mountains, deserts, and great distances to separate,

1 Genesis 11:1

2 Genesis 10:25

and to keep separate, the people of Earth. God fragmented the population of Earth.

For thousands of years, wide open spaces and natural barriers prevented weaker nations from being dominated by stronger ones. God knows the evil mind and selfish heart of man. Man seeks power. Ambitious men and women strive for mastery and wealth, and when wicked men use their wealth and power for malicious purposes, the result is total ruin.

Consider Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, Napoleon, and Hitler. Man wants the honor, glory, and power of God. When God separated people into widely dispersed groups, He prevented one man or one corrupt system from ruling over humanity with complete control until God determined it would happen. I write *until or unless God* because, during the time of the end, God will allow the devil to achieve world dominion.

God prevented the devil from corrupting all humanity at one time as he did before the flood by dividing the earth and separating the people. In other words, if a particular civilization became evil and corrupt, God could destroy that nation without having to destroy the whole world.¹

¹ Jeremiah 18:7–11

Short Story

A couple of hundred years after God divided the world, He looked over the earth and selected *a man of faith* to be a trustee of His covenant with humanity. God chose Abraham to be the trustee of *His covenant*. God's covenant of salvation has always been with all humankind. God first gave this covenant to Adam and Eve the day they sinned,¹ and from time to time, God renewed and expanded man's understanding of it. God's offer of salvation is a unilateral covenant with man meaning that whether or not man responds, believes, or accepts the covenant, God will do all He promised. Another example of a unilateral covenant with man is God's promise that He will not destroy the earth with a flood again. The rainbow is a sign or token of that covenant.

The Bible clearly states that God does not favor one person over another.² Jesus said, **“For God so loved the world.”**³ All humanity is His, and He loves all of us accordingly. When God made Abraham the trustee of His covenant,⁴ He commissioned Abraham and his descendants to be

1 Genesis 3:15

2 Acts 10:34-35

3 John 3:16

4 Genesis 17

representatives of *His covenant* upon the earth.¹ God chose Abraham and his descendants to be His ambassadors of light to the world concerning matters of salvation and truth.² Apostle Paul proves this point in his talk with the Jews. He says, “**For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’**”³ God gave them a parcel of land in the center of the nations so that as travel and commerce developed, traders and merchants would pass through Israel and hear about the true God. Notice this text: “**This is what the Sovereign Lord says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.**”⁴

The Old Testament often confirms that Israel failed to be the ambassadors God wanted, and God repeatedly punished them for their unfaithfulness. Even after the destruction of Jerusalem and 70 years of the Babylonian captivity (605–536 BC), Israel’s apostasy continued. When Messiah, Jesus Christ, arrived among His ambassadors, He was rejected and crucified because they did not know

1 In Genesis 17, God refers to His covenant as “My covenant.”

2 Isaiah 42

3 Acts 13:47

4 Ezekiel 5:5

God. God, in the form of Christ, stood in their temple, and they did not recognize Him.¹ The Jews believed they were the chosen people of God, and anyone who wanted salvation must *join* their nation or church.² The Jews became self-centered in their theology, claiming their father was the great patriarch Abraham and Moses was their prophet who wrote the Torah and spoke with almighty God as a man says—face to face.³ They believed that God's covenant was limited to them, rather than God appointing them to be ambassadors of His salvation. Moses clarified that God did not set Israel up because they were a great people. Instead, God appointed the descendants of Abraham as ambassadors because God honored Abraham's faith.⁴

Every religion appropriates God's prerogatives. Religions or denominations always favor those who agree with them and diminish those who disagree with them. The Jews could not save anyone. They could only represent and present the God of heaven who saves people. Joining Israel's nation or religion could not save anyone. Joining the nation of Israel did permit an *outsider* to participate as God's

1 John 1:11

2 Matthew 23:15

3 Exodus 33:11

4 Deuteronomy 7:6-9; Genesis 17:4

trustee of the covenant of salvation. However, God chose the Jews to be ambassadors to the Gentiles because He loves Gentiles just like He loves Jews. The means to salvation for both groups has always been a life of faith.

As far as God is concerned, the only difference between Jew and Gentile, from the beginning, is the appointment of one man as an ambassador of His covenant of salvation for the benefit of the other. After Christ died, God eliminated all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles.¹ Every person who receives Christ is considered an heir of Abraham.²

God has the covenant of salvation with all of humanity: Submit to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, repent of your sins, set your heart to do God's will, and you will have eternal life. God wants humanity to hear His generous offer, so He has appointed ambassadors to share the good news. When the Jews failed to accomplish God's plans, He raised a new group of ambassadors. He abandoned the nation of Israel³ and appointed the twelve apostles as ambassadors to the world.⁴ God has a plan for all to hear the good news. However, multitudes who

1 Galatians 3; Ephesians 2

2 Galatians 3:28–29

3 Matthew 23:38

4 Matthew 28:19–20

have never heard the good news of salvation die daily. They may be saved even if they do not know God as we know God.

God Did It

We have examined the topic of the world's fragmentation because it was God's doing. God is sovereign. It is God's will that there are many nations, cultures, languages, and religions. Remember, God loves all the people of the world. God did not divide the world so that most of the world would be in darkness and have no means of salvation. God is responsible for dividing the world into peoples, nations, languages, and tribes. He did it by divine decree. How many billions of people have lived on this planet, since Adam and Eve, that did not know the truth about the God of heaven? Do you think they are lost because they did not learn the *truth* about God and His Son, Jesus Christ? Salvation is not based on knowledge of the truth. Instead, salvation is based on submitting to God's Spirit. This does not mean that truth is not essential for those who know Jesus. On the contrary, we need to understand the truth about God's salvation and His ways.

God's offer of salvation is not limited to one *true church*, nor is it restricted to those with system-

atic theology, as many Christians believe. In other words, God divided the earth into continents, and His PLAN of Salvation applies to the varied theologies of humanity. Consider the following three statements (with explanations following) to think about:

1. A person can receive salvation without accurately knowing the only true God.
2. A person can receive salvation without knowing Jesus Christ.
3. A person can receive salvation without knowingly becoming a Christian.

These statements will undoubtedly give most evangelicals heartburn, for evangelicals are convinced that a person must have a knowledge of Christ and consciously receive Christ as their Savior to be saved. For this reason, evangelicals see themselves as very important to the cause of Christ. I will show from Scripture the basis for my three points. However, we need to consider the popular logic that many evangelicals follow. Evangelicals are evangelists for the cause of Christ because their theology produces the following conclusions:

1. All non-Christians are condemned and have no salvation.

2. Only *born-again* Christians have salvation.
3. Evangelicals will preach the gospel to all the world before the end.¹

Many evangelicals reach these convictions through a faulty interpretation of Scripture. Before we look at the biblical evidence against the conclusions of evangelical logic, notice that the Jews at the time of Christ believed these *same* issues.

1. All non-Jews were condemned and had no salvation.
2. Only *descendants* of Abraham had salvation.
3. Jews would preach the gospel to all Gentiles before Messiah set up His kingdom.²

Note the parallels between the Jews of New Testament times and evangelical theology today. The following briefly explains the basis of Jewish attitudes and what God intended to accomplish through Abraham's offspring. How does one reconcile the preaching of the gospel with the offer of salvation if a person can be saved without having an accurate knowledge of God and the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary? Let us review the assertions and arguments.

¹ Matthew 24:14

² Isaiah 49, 56; Matthew 23:15

1. The Bible teaches that a person can receive salvation without an accurate knowledge of God. Paul wrote in Romans 2:14, **“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.”** In other words, when a person follows the promptings of the Holy Spirit, doing what he understands to be God’s will even though he does not know God’s true will, God accepts the submission of that person as though he knew the truth. Indeed, in the case of which Paul speaks, if a submissive Gentile had known the will of the true God, he would have submitted. This is the full meaning of justification. God justifies us based on our willingness, not the accuracy of our knowledge!

This is what I meant by a merciful stranger rescuing a baby from the train headed for destruction. God is willing to save us even if we are ignorant of Him. The only sin that cannot be forgiven is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.¹ All other sins can be forgiven. This is because God’s Spirit speaks to man’s heart. If we refuse the Spirit, then God cannot dwell within. God

¹ Matthew 12:31

will live in any man's heart if that man is willing. What the man may know, or may not know, of God is immaterial. The Holy Spirit will ensure we know all that is necessary if we are willing to learn from God.

2. A person can receive salvation without knowing Jesus Christ. Who has greater condemnation: Those who have never heard the name of Christ or those who claim to be Christian but haven't sacrificed themselves to spread the offer of His salvation? The Bible teaches that people can receive salvation without knowing Jesus Christ, even though man is only reconciled to the Father through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 5:10, **“For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”** God reconciled all people unto himself through Christ. God did this while we were His enemies so He might save all who will listen to the Holy Spirit. In other words, all humanity, regardless of religion, has been reconciled to God through the atonement of Christ.¹

¹ Acts 4:12

Now, if any man will submit to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, that man shall have salvation, even though he may not know the name of Christ. The story of the Roman centurion in Acts 10 provides an example. When the Lord sent Peter to the home of Cornelius (a devout Gentile), Cornelius and his family rejoiced to know more about God and His son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit confirmed their devotion to God.

3. A person can receive salvation without knowingly becoming a Christian. Many people among the Islamic, Jewish, and Eastern religions love God as much as any Christian. Notice Christ's words, **"I have other sheep [Gentiles] that are not of this sheep pen [Israel]. I must bring them [into the family of God] also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."**¹

In this text, Jesus clearly says He has sheep among the Gentiles. This means that *Gentile sheep* are not *Jewish sheep*. Nevertheless, God reckons anyone who listens to His voice as His sheep. God has people in every religious system on Earth. The fact that our world is fragmented

1 John 10:16, insertions mine

does not frustrate the offer of salvation from God. God's people have the assurance of salvation through the sacrifice and mediation of Christ, even if many people are not aware of just *how* they are reconciled to God. Further, salvation is not based on knowledge. It is based on faith in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason, we can safely assume that millions of people are sincere in their commitment to God (as they know God), yet they do not understand the provisions God has so generously put forth for their benefit. Therefore, God has always had ambassadors. God grants the light of truth to some people for the benefit of all others. However, if God's ambassadors refuse to share or distort the light, God abandons the evil servants and raises another group.

Send More Missionaries!

After hearing these remarks, some have said that if everyone has salvation merely through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, then why should Christians be so eager to make disciples for Christ? If everyone can be saved without hearing about Christ's atonement, why bother sending missionar-

ies worldwide? Only in the doctrines of Christ are God's purposes and will be disclosed to man. In other words, the revelation of Jesus and the teaching of His doctrines explain the will, the plans, and the purposes of the Father. Jesus is the source of truth about God.¹ Jesus came to Earth to reveal the Father.² Therefore, the exaltation of Christ leads to a greater understanding of God. Paul wrote, **“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.”**³ Christ's preaching has no value if the Holy Spirit has not subdued the listeners.⁴ Missionary endeavor is of little importance if the Holy Spirit does not prepare the hearts of the listeners.

God's Righteousness or Man's Righteousness

A time is coming when God will *impart* His righteousness to every person willing to live by faith. God created Adam and Eve with a predisposition toward righteousness and repulsion to sin. However, their predisposition toward righteousness changed after sinning with an attraction to sin. Unfortunately, they passed their sinful inclination

1 John 6:46-47

2 John 14:9; 17:6

3 2 Corinthians 5:20

4 1 Corinthians 2:14

to their offspring. This predisposition is sometimes called *fallen nature*. Whenever a person submits to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and submits to God, God *imputes* the righteousness of Christ to that person. This means God considers that person as perfect through the merits of Christ even though he is still a sinner.

The word *impart* means to bestow or bequeath. The Bible speaks of a time when God will no longer *impute* [credit] His righteousness to man. Instead, He will *impart* [give] the nature of Christ to His children.¹ Before long, God will transform our carnal nature into a spirit of righteousness. In other words, God will grant those who receive His seal during the Great Tribulation a heart free from the predisposition to sin—just like Adam and Eve had before sinning.

Notice these verses: **“For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”²** **“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law [the books of Moses] and the Prophets**

1 Hebrews 8:10–12

2 Romans 1:17

[the remaining portions of the Old Testament] **testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.**"¹

Paul revealed two points. First, the gospel reveals divine righteousness not connected with man's behavior which is righteousness apart from the law. To prove his point, Paul added that the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) attest to this righteousness. Second, Paul stated that God's righteousness is neither produced nor found within man because God's righteousness comes *from* God through man's faith.

The subject of righteousness by faith can be very confusing and frustrating. In many ways, the study of God's righteousness is much like the study of prophecy. We can become baffled if we do not define the elements or correctly identify the relationship between the details. For this discussion, I sharply distinguish between man's and God's righteousness. Each is distinct, both are important, and they are unlike each other. Man's righteousness is a result of man's obedience. Man's righteousness comes from obedience to the law. *The more closely man conforms to the law's requirements, the more*

1 Romans 3:21–22, insertions mine

perfect man becomes in the eyes of the law since there is less for the law to condemn.

God's righteousness, however, is not defined by His laws. God's righteousness is His character of love which is complete selflessness. The qualities of God's character go far beyond our most profound understanding. He has all power, all knowledge, and omnipresence, yet everything God does is to benefit His creation.

Jesus came to Earth to reveal God's righteousness—God's character. Jesus revealed God's righteousness through His life of complete selflessness. Jesus said, **“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”**¹ **“I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.”**² **“But he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”**³

Jesus was wholly devoted to serving His Father. Jesus never violated the Father's will; thus, He *never* fell short of God's glory. So, there are two distinct types of righteousness: One is human and defined by law,

1 John 6:38

2 John 8:28

3 John 14:3

and the other is apart from man and defined by God's character of selflessness, which Jesus revealed.

The Scriptures reveal that at the appointed time—during the 1,260 days of the Two Witnesses—God will impart His righteousness to each person willing to live by faith. Our faith will be severely tested. God will see who trusts Him enough to submit to His authority. This is the sealing described in Revelation 7:2; 9:4; 10:7; and 11:1. The issue in days to come will not be whether one is sinless or not. That is a moot point. The Bible says that no one is without sin.¹ The coming controversy will focus on worshiping God.

What About Cheap Grace?

Some religious leaders interpret my view of imparting Christ's righteousness as *cheap grace*. They conclude that if a person does not have to overcome every sin to receive God's seal, they should not be concerned about sin. However, they have missed the essential point that the greatest sin on Earth is refusing the conviction of the Holy Spirit. God can forgive all other sins, but He will not forgive blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.² No one can receive the *imputed* righteousness of Christ,

¹ Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:10

² Matthew 12:31

nor will anyone receive the *imparted* righteousness of Christ, except by submitting to the Holy Spirit. This also explains why I cannot judge another man. I cannot condemn another person without knowing his response to the Holy Spirit. What I can see and compare are man's actions. Our deeds reveal what we know and understand about God and His ways.

Remember, there is a distinct difference between God's imputed righteousness and God's imparted righteousness. The word *imputed* means that God regards a person to be righteous even though the person is a sinner. The word *imparted* means God will bestow His righteousness on a person. I mention these terms because God has been imputing His righteousness to all who looked to Him in faith for salvation ever since Adam and Eve sinned.

Some people falsely believe the key to being sealed is spiritual maturity. A man does not receive God's seal because he has been a Christian for 70 years. I have friends who have been Christians for over 70 years and will tell you they are imperfect. A person's spiritual growth does not end when that person obtains God's seal. Spiritual maturity is a byproduct of walking with God, but spiritual maturity cannot change sinful nature. Spiritual ma-

turity produces greater faith and love for God and man. When God seals His people, He will *impart* His righteousness to all who look to Him through faith for salvation. God will bestow His character of righteousness on every sinner willing to live by faith. This is the mystery of God.¹

Righteousness Necessary for Salvation

God's righteousness, not man's righteousness, is necessary for salvation. This is the good news of the everlasting gospel. God will grant His righteousness to all who submit to Him. This is not to say that man's lesser righteousness is of no value. Man's righteousness is beneficial but is no substitute for God's righteousness. Man's righteousness is beneficial for man, not God. God commands man to obey His laws. God gave laws to us for our well-being, and we should make every effort to live by the principles that God has revealed in His laws. This issue confuses many people because they think man's righteousness contributes to eternal life. It is the source of many faulty ideas about God, His laws, and His salvation.

Paul clearly shows that man's righteousness does not satisfy the requirements for eternal life. **“For it**

¹ Colossians 1:26–27; Revelation 10:7

is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”¹

The gospel does not waver on this point. We cannot save ourselves by obedience—man’s righteousness. If this were possible, Jesus would not have had to die on the cross. No one will receive God’s righteousness because they obeyed the Ten Commandments. Instead, a person receives God’s gift of righteousness through faith in Him. Faith produces works, but works do not produce salvation. Our most significant concern should be living in harmony with the Holy Spirit. This is where faith enters. As we live the life of faith, the Spirit will direct our paths and plans. He will lead us to love God’s law.²

It is easy to be confused about this topic, especially if you grew up in a home where your parents demanded religious obedience. The Pharisees in Christ’s day believed obedience was the key to salvation. Those blind leaders carefully complied with hundreds of religious laws. They taught that perfect obedience was the key to eternal life and their excessive legalism made it seem that no one else had any hope of eternal life. Their extraordinary commitment to obedience made

¹ Ephesians 2:8–9

² Psalm 119:97–165

them blind to their need for God's righteousness. They became bigots, self-centered hypocrites, and blind guides in trying to establish their righteousness. They lost sight of the foundational principles underlying God's moral law of mercy, justice, and love. Jesus rebuked them, saying, **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”**¹

Jesus shows that man's obedience is necessary when He said it was proper to give God the tenth, but it is wrong to neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Remember, *God does not grant salvation based on obedience*. Jesus told the disciples, **“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”**² These words astonished the disciples, for they regarded the Pharisees as *holy men*.

On another occasion, Jesus demonstrated that man's righteousness is no substitute for God's righteous-

1 Matthew 23:23

2 Matthew 5:20

ness. In Luke 18, a wealthy young ruler came to Jesus asking what he must do to have a place in the coming kingdom of heaven. Jesus, knowing the heart of the young man, engaged the young man's attention by appealing to his sense of self-righteousness. Jesus said, **"You know the commandments."** The young man eagerly assured Jesus, **"All these I have kept since I was a boy."** Jesus then said, **"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** The young man was stunned by this qualification for salvation and sorrowfully turned away.

As the disciples watched, they were baffled. What they thought necessary for salvation and what Jesus taught about salvation were different! Jesus knew their thoughts were confused as the rich young ruler walked away. He turned to them and said, **"Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."** Those who heard this asked, **"Who then can be saved?"** Jesus replied, **"What is impossible with man is possible with God."**¹ Notice that last sentence: **"What is impossible with men is possible with God."**

¹ Luke 18:25-27

So, the way to eternal life is not through obedience to the law. It has never saved anyone, nor can it. Salvation is only based on God's righteousness. God will grant His righteousness to anyone who becomes willing to submit to the Holy Spirit and live a selfless life. This is the gospel.

Salvation Through God's Righteousness

God offers His righteousness to us when we become willing to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. This is how the Pharisees and the rich young ruler failed. They were not motivated by selfless love for God and man. They were only interested in establishing their righteousness and saving themselves. Those who receive the gift of God's righteousness become more concerned about the salvation of others.

Self-righteousness lives at the center of human nature. If you do not believe me, conduct this simple experiment: Condemn someone for an insignificant deed and watch them justify themselves. It is natural for human nature to justify itself, regardless of the seriousness of its behavior. It is no mystery that prisons are full of self-justifying people.

This is the heart of the matter. Human nature wants

to justify itself by depending upon human effort. God, on the other hand, knows that our soul is corrupt. Sinners are self-centered. So, God himself provided Jesus as the atonement for us because man could not atone for his sin. Jesus became the *Lamb of God*, not the *Lamb of man*. God needed a perfect man to make atonement for man, and He provided that perfect man—His only Son. Once Jesus atoned for man, the Father proceeded to grant His righteousness to man through faith as a gift. **“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!”¹**

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

This question came from a desperate man.² Indeed, God’s offer of salvation is for despairing individuals because those who come to realize their *need* for salvation sense they *must have* salvation or perish. If one has not experienced the distress that comes from recognizing he has no relationship with God, then the subject of salvation may not be as imperative as it should. Indeed, the topic of salvation can

¹ Romans 5:17

² Acts 16:30-31

be little more than an academic matter to those who do not realize their needy condition before God. Jesus said, **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”**¹ In other words, those who do not discern their actual condition regarding God cannot appreciate His generous offer of salvation.

How does one come to desperately desire salvation? The desire rises only through the working of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart. In some instances, it starts in early childhood. As a child matures, the Holy Spirit influences the child in matters of righteousness (right doing). Suppose the child is fortunate enough to have godly parents and wholesome training. In that case, the Holy Spirit’s work is easier because parental example and teaching are in harmony with the Holy Spirit’s objectives. If the child does not have godly parents, the Holy Spirit’s work is difficult because the child will not be so clearly informed about God and His ways. In either case, the Holy Spirit impresses attentive people with a sense of right and wrong.

Fortunately, most children reach the state of accountability, knowing enough about life to discern morally right from wrong. Because a young adult is a free moral agent (not a slave of God or the devil or

¹ Matthew 9:12

even parents), he will make many personal choices that further develop life's direction. A young adult does not have to submit to God. He can neglect and/or indefinitely reject the work of the Holy Spirit. Remember, rejecting the Holy Spirit is the only sin for which there is no forgiveness.¹ Submitting to God and the workings of the Holy Spirit is contrary to our self-centered human nature. The Bible says we are born with a carnal nature—naturally opposed to God.² Because every person begins life in a carnal state, the Holy Spirit's influence is kept proportionate to his desire. The Holy Spirit will not overpower the conscience or the will of any of God's creatures. However, the Holy Spirit seeks to bring us into a submissive, saving relationship with God.

Because we are easily distracted by the cares of this life, the Holy Spirit capitalizes on desperate situations where a *new birth* (complete surrender and transformation of our carnal nature) can take place. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit pushes us into desperate situations; instead, He is present in desperate situations to show our need for God. Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit will not force himself upon us. The process of being born again is

1 Matthew 12:31

2 Romans 8:7–8

no less miraculous than being born of flesh. When a person surrenders to God, a miracle takes place. He becomes born again, and the will of the human is fused into the will of God. Think about it, a free moral agent surrendering his will to someone he cannot physically see. It's truly marvelous! So, the work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal our need for God and to watch for those moments when our hearts are ready for transformation.

The Holy Spirit is at work upon every human heart.¹ He ever works to open our minds to the knowledge and will of God even when we rebel. He does not cease His work until we commit the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin is persistent and total defiance (blasphemy) against the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, we may defy God because we lack faith. I am not writing about sin that confronts and sometimes overpowers us. The Holy Spirit often reveals our weaknesses through failures and sorrowful events so that our need for God is made exceedingly clear.

Let's review a few points: Man needs God. God does not need man. God naturally loves man even though man does not naturally love God. Because of this,

¹ 1 Peter 4:6; John 16:8

God has given the gift of the Holy Spirit to all humanity to bring the realization that man needs God.¹ God wants man to experience the fullness of life, but the fullness of life only comes through knowing the Life Giver. Sometimes, a crisis is a vehicle that exposes our accountability to God. Occasionally, we are tested to see if we will stand firm for what we believe is right. In other cases, a heartfelt need for God's salvation can come (and go) as quietly as the morning fog. It is through the continual work of the Holy Spirit that human beings face the test of total surrender to God. Will man serve God, or will man reject the claims of God? These testing experiences are called moments of truth.² It is not a comfortable experience, and they happen more than once, yet a moment of truth is a situation where every person faces the truth about himself and God's sovereignty.

GO-BE-DO

God wants His people to have a willing heart that joyfully renders obedience through love above all else.³ The Bible is clear. Salvation comes by faith.⁴ What is faith? Faith is this: A willingness to **GO** wherever God wants me to go, a willingness to **BE**

1 John 16:7-11

2 Acts 24:25

3 Psalm 51:17

4 Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 4:2-11

all that God wants me to be, and a willingness to **DO** all that God wants me to do. Go-Be-Do! Listen for the voice of God. Surrender to the Holy Spirit. This is the way that God speaks to His creatures. When we consider God's offer of salvation, the price that He paid for our sins, and His interest in each one of us, how can we doubt that God is love? If the Father loved us enough to give up His only Son and Jesus loved us enough to submit to death, shouldn't we reciprocate with love enough to submit to His commands joyfully?

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.”¹ “If you love me, keep my commands.”² “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.”³ If you are grateful for God's offer of salvation, why not submit your life to your Creator, worship your King, and give Him the glory He deserves?

Larry Wilson

1 Ecclesiastes 12:13

2 John 14:15

3 John 15:10

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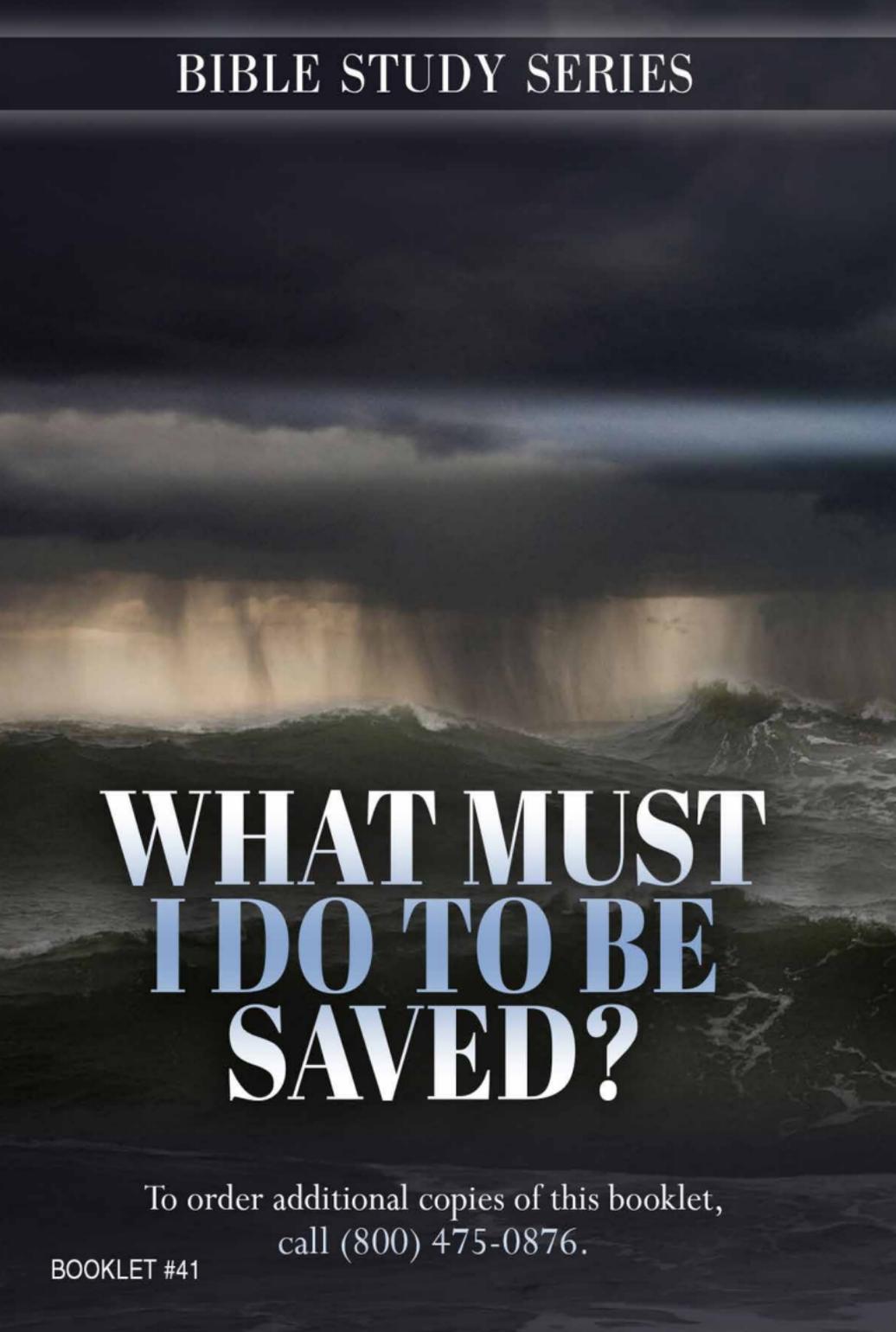
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