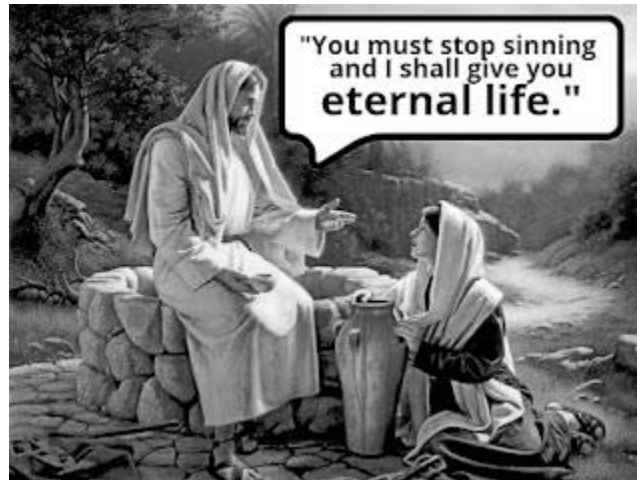


Saturday, December 31, 2022

Must You Stop Sinning To Receive Eternal Life?



Did Jesus tell the woman at the well in John chapter 4, "You must stop sinning and I shall give you eternal life"? Not at all! For what does the Bible say? According to the Bible, Jesus said to the woman: *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water"* (John 4:10, NKJV).

* * *

Must a person stop sinning in order to be saved, or at least be willing to give up certain sins in order to receive eternal life? Lordship Salvationists say "yes", but what does the Bible say?

Notice the following statements by John MacArthur, one of today's leading Lordship Salvationists: "I remember when I used to discuss this lordship issue and this kind of commitment for salvation with other theologians in the time when I was writing the material on *The Gospel According to Jesus*, they would pose a question. One of the main guys posed this question to me. If you have a couple that you know and they're living in adultery, they're not married and they're living together and you're going to give them the gospel, do you say to them you must stop sinning and then come to Christ? Or do you say nothing about that, just come to Christ and worry about that later? Well, the answer to the question would be, what would Jesus say. What would Jesus say? Jesus would say this. You have a quote 'love' going on here. Whether it's love or not, I don't know, but you have an affair going on, you have a relationship going on. How important

is it for you to receive the forgiveness of sin and eternal life? Because if you're not willing to put a sword in that relationship or any other relationship and to deny the thing your heart craves, then you're not worthy to be My disciple. That really became the nexus of that whole debate."[1]

And it's not just the "big" sins that Lordship Salvationists say must be given up in order to be saved. They go so far as to say that unless a person gives up smoking cigarettes (or at least is willing to give up smoking cigarettes), they cannot be saved! Regarding this, Charles Ryrie shares the following true story of a run-in he had with a group of Lordship Salvationists who accosted him one time at an airport. Ryrie relates the following incident in his book *So Great Salvation*: "Some years ago in another country I was literally accosted after an evening service by a group of American missionaries working in that country. They had been infected by the lordship/discipleship/mastery Gospel, and having read the thirteen pages I had written about the subject in 1969 [in *Balancing the Christian Life*], they were anxious to debate the issue. I did not know them; they were uninvited; but I could not avoid meeting with them. So we talked for quite a while that night. Finally it came down to an illustration. I posed this case to them. We all knew, even at that time, that smoking had been proven a serious risk to one's health. I asked about a hypothetical person who wanted to be saved, but he smoked. Furthermore, he knew full well that smoking was endangering his health, and he realized that if he became a Christian he ought to give it up. But he was unable to do so, nor was he even willing. So I asked these folks, 'Can he not be saved until either he gives up smoking or is willing to give up smoking?' Reluctantly they admitted that their view compelled them to say no, he cannot."[2]

Years ago William R. Newell wrote a gospel tract titled "The Only Kind of People God Saves". The tract is based on Romans 4:5, and it's very applicable to the Lordship Salvation debate. After quoting Romans 4:5, Newell writes the following: "I wish to call your attention to one fact—God justifies ungodly men. He does not justify all ungodly men, but He justifies ONLY ungodly men. Men think that because they have been ungodly and wicked, God demands a change in their character before He receives them. This is not true. The quotation above definitely says that 'God justifies the ungodly who believe.' What then does God ask an ungodly sinner to do? First of all, nothing, that is, to cease from absolutely all efforts to save himself. For the verse says, 'To him that worketh not.' A man is asked simply to accept God's verdict about him—that he is ungodly, unrighteous, and unable to save himself. Second, accept the blessed news that God Himself has already reckoned his sins and ungodliness to another Person, that is, to Christ, His Son, and that, because the punishment of sin was death, Jesus has by God's appointment died, has shed His blood, in the sinner's place. 'The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53:6). Christ died for our sins—that is, instead of our dying

for them. Death here means banishment from God under a curse, and Christ bearing our sins was forsaken on the cross as accursed of God. (Matthew 27:46; Gal. 3:13.) Now when an ungodly man finds these two great truths: first, that he is utterly guilty and unable to help himself, and second, that Jesus Christ has already borne sin, in his place, by God's appointment; and when this ungodly man just accepts these facts and trusts this Saviour, whom God raised from the dead to be trusted, this ungodly man is saved then and there. That is, God forgives and justifies him on the basis of the price already paid—the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Do you believe this? Or, are you still trying to REFORM yourself—promising yourself that you will do better, and merit God's favor thus? Why do you not believe what God says: By deeds of righteousness shall no flesh be justified in God's sight? (Romans 3:20; Titus 3:5.) Listen to the Gospel: 'To him that WORKETH NOT BUT BELIEVETH on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness' (Romans 4:5). This is good news! Every sinner in the world could have this salvation, if he were willing, this moment. Let anyone who wants Christ claim Him at once. As a sinner, claim the Saviour God has appointed for sinners, as your very own Saviour this moment. He sees your heart. Trust Him now as yours, and lo, He is yours!"[3]

The problem with MacArthur's view of the gospel is that he confuses salvation with discipleship. That's typical of Lordship Salvation. But more than that, MacArthur's gospel clearly contradicts what the Bible says about the only kind of people God saves: not those who clean up their lives first, but "the ungodly"!

"Just As I Am"

A Gospel Hymn

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within, without,

O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

—*Charlotte Elliot*

References:

[1] John MacArthur, "The Extreme Nature of True Discipleship, Part 1" (October 16, 2005), *Grace To You* website. Sermon on Luke 14:25-27.
<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/42-195/the-extreme-nature-of-true-discipleship-part-1> (accessed December 31, 2022).

[2] Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: SP Publications, Inc., 1989), pp. 112-113.

[3] William R. Newell, "The Only Kind of People God Saves" (Chicago: Good News Pub. Co., no date), pp. 1-3. Note: There is a date stamp from the library of the University of Illinois on the front cover of the tract with the date: "APR 4 1942".

Posted by Jonathan Perreault