

Gospel Guidebook

Getting and Keeping
It Right

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The Need for Getting the Gospel Right

The Apostle Paul places a heavy emphasis on getting the gospel right and keeping it right. The gospel is offensive (1 Corinthians 1:23), for it debars all boasting (Romans 3:27). Therefore, there is a strong temptation to replace it with "another gospel, which is not another" (Galatians 1:6-7). It is even possible to get it right and then lose it. The Galatians, for example, "did run well" (Galatians 5:7), but were hindered from obeying the truth by some influential people who were offended by the cross (Galatians 5:11). Paul told the churches to be on guard against such people (Acts 20:29) and even went as far as to warn against "another gospel," "another spirit," and "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4). The gospel is under continuous attack by God's enemies, for they seek to hide its truth and blind people's minds from it (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Knowing this, we should really be examining ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5) and asking ourselves, "Lord is it I?" (Matthew 26:22). Have I received another gospel, another spirit, or another Jesus? The purpose of this short work is to identify the gospel and distinguish between the different aspects of it so that the reader can get it right and keep it right.

Precision is extremely important when it comes to the gospel of Christ. However, we live in a post-modern and politically correct world where everything is subjective and feelings are paramount. This type of environment is obviously not friendly to those who want to standfast in truth. More than this, however, I believe it has created real dullness and indifference toward the gospel. In other words, close is good enough. But this type of thinking is really a slippery slope because "close" will keep getting farther and farther from the truth. Therefore, let's take our stand and be determined to get it right. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing that matters. All other discussions must take a back seat to the gospel.

On a personal note, getting the gospel right is an issue that I have struggled with for over 15 years. To say that I have struggled is actually an understatement, for I have suffered immensely primarily due to my own disbelief of plain Scripture verses, but also on account of the confusion, lack of precision, and downright error taught concerning the gospel of Christ. Thanks to the Internet, it has become quite easy to survey the landscape of Christianity by visiting websites and video-sharing sites to learn firsthand what people are teaching. I have been blessed by several teachers (and owe my life and sanity to a couple of them), but have come to the sad conclusion that the overwhelming majority of Bible teachers, evangelists, and missionaries do not actually understand the gospel and often do much more harm than good. I suppose that such a blanket statement regarding the majority of teachers will offend many, but if my statement turns out to be true, it shouldn't surprise anyone, for the apostasy from truth was occurring even while the apostles were still alive (Acts 20:29, 2 Timothy 1:15, 2 Peter 2, 1 John 2:18-19, Jude). I will admit, though with shame, that I myself was a useless missionary who got the gospel wrong and did more harm than good. That was a long time ago, but the regret still remains with me. However, by the grace of God, my eyes were opened (John 9:25), and I do believe that I now have some light to offer on the topic of the gospel. It is my hope that, perhaps, I might help some people escape from the current confusion that is all around us.

Getting the Gospel Right

A clear presentation of the gospel is given in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul is reminding the Corinthians of the message he declared to them while they were still unbelievers: "Christ died for our sins and rose again!" This message declares a fact. It is unchangeable truth, regardless of whether it is believed or not. Paul proclaimed the cross (i.e., that Christ died for our sins) to all people. To those that perish, the message is foolishness, but to those who are saved, it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). Again, regardless of whether they perish or are saved, the truth remains the same: "Christ died for our sins." It is very important to understand this. It is what Paul and the rest of the apostles taught (1 Corinthians 15:11). It presents salvation in an absolute sense because it depends solely upon God and is not influenced by other factors, such as the acts or belief of God's creatures. Thus, from God's point of view, salvation has been completed. There is nothing left to do. The whole world has already been saved (2 Corinthians 5:14-21, John 1:29, 1 John 2:2).

One of the difficulties is distinguishing between the absolute and relative in Scripture. I find this especially true when it comes to the gospel. The gospel can be declared in an absolute sense such as mentioned above, or it can be declared in a relative sense. In an absolute sense, God has accomplished and guaranteed salvation for everyone, without exception, through the cross of Christ. In a

relative sense, each person needs to enter into this salvation individually through belief. I will describe this relative sense of salvation in much more detail later, but for now I would like to further clarify my point about the absolute because it is my contention that most people do not understand this aspect of salvation. Rather, they focus all their attention on the relative, emphasizing what man must do. As a result, they are unable to proclaim, "Christ died for our sins." They may say the words, but what they mean is "Christ died for our sins if we do such and such," which usually entails saying a prayer, coming up to the altar, confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior, submitting to the lordship of Jesus, repenting of sins, or making a decision to accept Jesus. But this is wrong. The distinction between the absolute and relative must be understood if you want to get the gospel right. Paul proclaimed that "Christ died for our sins" (i.e., the absolute) and that it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (i.e., the relative) (1 Corinthians 1:21).

The Scripture declares that Christ is the "Savior of the world" (John 1:29, 4:42, 1 John 4:14). This fits well with the foregoing discussion. It is an absolute declaration. If He doesn't in fact save the world, it is not proper to call Him the Savior of the world. That's the truth. It is only when we recognize Him as Savior of the world that the proclamation "Christ died for our sins" actually makes sense. Otherwise, we are basically stuck with telling people that "Christ died for our sins if we do such and such." But such a declaration is equivalent to saying, "Christ potentially died for our sins." We inadvertently change Scripture like that when we fail to recognize the absolute and see everything in Scripture as relative.

Jesus is the one who successfully takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), gives life to the world (John 6:33), is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), and is the one who abolishes death (2 Timothy 1:10). We must believe these things. They are absolute truths. Let's guard against inadvertently changing

Scripture because of our misunderstanding of the absolute or because of unbelief. For example, when we are admonished to "do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10), nobody has a problem understanding that "all men" literally means all people. But when we are told that "[God] is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Timothy 4:10), then many people have a problem. All of a sudden, "all men" doesn't literally mean all people, and the word "specially" doesn't refer to the distinguished position of believers among all men who have a Savior. Instead, "all men" means "some men" and "specially" means "but only actually." God is reduced to the potential Savior of all men, and all men simply become savable. These things ought not to be! Misunderstanding and unbelief are two big reasons why people don't get the gospel right.

There are some teachings in Scripture that seem clear enough, regardless of whether one understands the difference between the absolute and relative. For example, I think it would be safe to say that all Christians everywhere will agree that Jesus is greater than Adam. We are told that "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:47). That seems clear enough. In fact, Jesus Christ created Adam (Colossians 1:15-16), so it would seem only natural that whatever was lost in Adam (Romans 5:12), Jesus would at the very least be able to redeem, right? Otherwise, people might start to think that Adam was in fact greater than Jesus. Banish the thought! "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). And He won't just simply recover what Adam lost, but will do much more, for "the first man Adam was made a living soul," yet "the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45), whose Father "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). Yes! This goes way beyond restoring the garden of Eden! So, let's have courage and believe. There is really no excuse not to believe the above verses. It is true that "we see not yet all things put under him"

(Hebrews 2:8), but let's have faith that He will indeed reign until God becomes all in all (1 Corinthians 15:25-28) after all is made alive in Him (1 Corinthians 15:22), every tongue has confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11), and all God's works praise Him (Psalm 145:10).

What must we do to be saved? In an absolute sense, nothing at all! From God's point of view, the salvation of all has already been accomplished. Everyone, without exception, will be granted the grace to enter into this salvation personally in due time: "[Jesus] gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:6). The Greek word translated "time" here is actually plural, and there is nothing in the Greek or context that limits it to this life!

In a relative sense (i.e., in terms of our human experience), everyone needs to enter into this salvation individually. This is where belief comes into the equation. When a person asks, "What must I do to be saved?" (Act 16:30), we can confidently reply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31), for He has in fact "died for our sins," and we experience His salvation individually when we believe (Ephesians 1:13-14). However, we must stress that belief needs to be correctly understood. It is not the believer's belief that comprises an entitlement to salvation. In other words, the believer's belief does not obligate God. Rather, the believer's belief comprises a guarantee to the believer that he or she is one of God's vessels of mercy (Romans 9:23), who enters into this salvation during this life (Ephesians 1:13-14, 2:5, Colossians 1:13). Paul explains it like this: "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" (Ephesians 2:8-9). In other words, during this life, God graciously grants belief to all His chosen ones (Philippians 1:29). They are a firstfruits of his creatures and the firstfruits for salvation (James 1:18, Revelation 14:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 -- NA27), being those

who "first trusted" in Christ (Ephesians 1:12). The rest of the fruit (i.e., those who perish having never believed) will enjoy their inheritance of salvation and glory after the judgment, which does involve "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" (Romans 9:22, Romans 2:8-9), when God becomes all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28) following the abolishment of death (1 Corinthians 15:26, 2 Timothy 1:10), which refers to the second death (i.e., the lake of fire of Revelation 20:14), since it is the only death and enemy remaining at that time (i.e., "the end" in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). God will eventually have mercy on all, even on those who die locked up in unbelief (Romans 11:32, ISV)!

What a glorious message of good news! It makes you want to shout, "Hallelujah!" However, be warned that this glorious proclamation of good news, that God has already guaranteed salvation for all people and that people enter a personal experience of this salvation by just believing, is simply unacceptable to those who want to boast in the flesh. For them, just acknowledging that God's salvation is a gift, completely independent of our acts and enjoyed simply by believing, is utter foolishness and extremely offensive (1 Corinthians 1:21, Romans 4:4-8, Romans 11:6, Romans 9:30-33). Like the Galatians, they have been bewitched and are under a spell (Galatians 3:1), creating fanciful requirements of salvation like saying a prayer, coming up to the altar, making a decision, dedicating one's life, repenting of sin, or submitting to the lordship of Jesus instead of believing what God clearly says in the Bible -- it's a gift (Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9)! For those who can receive it, let's standfast in the truth that we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

At this point, I would like to clarify something important. I might have given the impression thus far that the gospel must be proclaimed exclusively in its absolute sense (i.e., that Christ has in fact saved everyone, having died for our sins). This is not strictly correct. The

gospel may also be proclaimed in a relative manner. For example, it is acceptable to declare, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). However, at some point during the presentation, the absolute should be proclaimed, since Christ dying for our sins and rising again are the essential pieces of information that all people need to receive. If the absolute is not kept in view, works will, in all instances and without exception, be added to the gospel either advertently or inadvertently by the preacher himself or by the people to whom he preaches. Works will emerge as either a condition of salvation in the form of prayers, altar calls, confession, repentance, or some other meritorious act thought to obligate God, and/or as a post-condition of salvation in the form of perseverance of belief or good works. Even belief itself can become a work if not properly understood. As mentioned above, belief does not obligate God. It simply constitutes a guarantee to the believer that he or she is in fact saved, for Christ did the work and we are justified by the "faith of Christ" (Galatians 2:16). Any addition of works nullifies the offense of the cross of Christ and the grace of God (Romans 11:6, Galatians 5:11, Galatians 2:21). I am purposely belaboring this point precisely because it is so little understood by those who profess to be teachers of the word of God. By recognizing and teaching that God's salvation is "unto all," absolutely speaking, and "upon all them that believe," relatively speaking (Romans 3:22), we provide ourselves and our hearers a correct foundation regarding God's plan and His justification of sinners.

Having laid the above groundwork, I would like to conclude by encouraging all people who are interested in proclaiming the gospel to follow in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul and trust that it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). Imagine simply proclaiming the gospel and watching unbelievers become believers without any invitations, coercion, or other methods of men! That would truly be a demonstration of the Spirit of God as described in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with

excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

In the book of Acts, there is an example of this kind of preaching. Paul declared, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39). He was in a synagogue, but there were Gentiles present, too. After warning the people against unbelief (Acts 13:40), the assembly was dismissed. There is no record of Paul employing any human methods such as invitations or hand raising. But what happens next is interesting. It says, "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath" (Acts 13:42). They simply heard and became interested! And on the following sabbath day, nearly the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God (Acts 13:44). The people sought after him! In today's churches it is usually the other way around. Today's churches employ all manner of human methods to attract people (such as concerts and social gatherings), but the truth is that these methods often hinder the gospel instead of advancing it. Therefore, let's just proclaim the gospel and let God handle the rest! This approach benefited those who listened to Paul, for "they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

Q&A for Keeping the Gospel Right

I will now answer some common questions regarding the foregoing sections. I recommend reading through these questions and answers even if you are fully assured that you got the gospel right, since I believe that the answers will help you keep the gospel right. If you have a question that is not addressed here, it might be answered indirectly by one of the answers. For example, Question 8 is primarily about 1 John, but also touches on Mark 9:43-48 and provides some further commentary on James 2:14-26.

Q1. Doesn't Matthew 25:46 teach that there is everlasting punishment?

No, it doesn't. For starters, if it did, it would contradict many clear Bible verses concerning Jesus and the salvation of all. I will explain this more precisely below.

Matthew 25:46 must be understood correctly. To do this, it must be either retranslated to give a more accurate translation of the words "everlasting" and "eternal" and clarify the nature of the "punishment," or it must be carefully compared with other verses in Scripture to determine the precise meaning of the words "everlasting," "eternal," and "punishment." I will do both.

First, I would like to show that an irreconcilable contradiction of Scripture exists if "everlasting punishment" does in fact mean endless torment. Let's start with a question. How can punishment be everlasting if God is indeed the Savior of all men (1 Timothy 4:10), has reconciled the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19), has taken away the sins of the world (John 1:29), is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), is the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14), will gather together in one all things in heaven and earth in Christ (Ephesians 1:10), reconciles all things to Himself whether

things in earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1:20), will have all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), makes all alive in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22), and will grant justification of life to all men by the righteousness of Christ (Romans 5:18)? This contradiction must be resolved. Does God actually save all, or is the punishment He inflicts endless?

Did you know that the majority of early theological schools believed in universal reconciliation (i.e., the salvation of all) through Jesus Christ? The respected Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge says this: "In the first five or six centuries of Christianity, there were six theological schools, of which four (Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, and Edessa or Nisibis) were Universalist; one (Ephesus) accepted conditional immortality; one (Carthage or Rome) taught endless punishment of the wicked" (See http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/encyc12/Page_96.html).

For the early Christian church, way before there were any English bibles, the teaching of universal reconciliation through Jesus Christ was commonplace as can be seen from the quotation given above. With this in mind, let's reexamine Matthew 25:46 in light of the original Greek and by comparing scripture with scripture.

When looking at the original Greek, we can find that the problem lies in the translation of the word "everlasting" and our understanding of the word "punishment."

Here is Matthew 25:46 in the received text: *καὶ ἀπελεύσονται οὗτοι εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον οἱ δὲ δίκαιοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον*

Here is a word for word translation: *καὶ* (and) *ἀπελεύσονται* (go away of themselves) *οὗτοι* (these) *εἰς* (into) *κόλασιν* (corrective punishment) *αἰώνιον* (pertaining to the age) *οἱ* (the) *δὲ* (but) *δίκαιοι* (just ones) *εἰς* (into) *ζωὴν* (life) *αἰώνιον* (pertaining to the age)

Here is a more accurate and literal translation: "And these, of themselves, shall go away into chastisement characterized by the age, but the just ones (i.e., those who have a declaration of righteousness upon them) into life characterized by the age."

I will now prove the accuracy of my translation by comparing scripture with scripture using the King James Bible. I will also use the American Standard Version and a quotation from Plato's Protagoras to strengthen my argument, but the scripture-with-scripture comparison using the King James Bible should in itself suffice to prove my point.

In the King James Bible, the words "everlasting," "eternal," and "for ever" do not mean unbeginning and/or unending. They refer to an indefinite period of time that has a beginning and an end. This period of time can be as short as a few days or as long as many hundreds of years.

A few examples should be sufficient to make this clear:

Let's consider Jude 7: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." From this verse, it would seem hopeless for them. They are destined to suffer fire for all eternity, right? Wrong! Compare this verse with Ezekiel 16:46-63. Sodom will be restored to its former estate!

As another example, let's consider 1 Kings 9:3 where God is responding to Solomon after the completion of the temple: "And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." However, Solomon's temple only lasted about 400 years.

Another example would be Jonah 2:6: "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God." Jonah was only in the fish for 3 days.

Let's contrast "for ever" and "unending." There is a perfect example in Luke 1:33: "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Yet, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet ... then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him." Notice that He reigns "till he hath put all enemies under his feet." His reign ends. He delivers the unending kingdom to the Father and He himself becomes subject unto the Father.

Also, let's consider these verses from the American Standard Version:

In 2 Timothy 1:9, it says, "who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal." Also, in Titus 1:2 it says, "in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal." Doesn't the expression "before times eternal" strike you as odd? Both "times" and "eternal" are plural in the Greek. Does that mean "before eternities upon eternities" or something? I am not sure. But if we understand that the word "eternal" is actually the adjective form of the word "age," then a translation such as "before times age-lasting" makes more sense, and can probably be paraphrased as "before the ages." The truth is that the words "everlasting," "eternal," "for ever," and "for ever and ever" in our English bibles don't actually mean without a beginning. And as shown above, they don't mean

unending either.

So, how can we understand all of this? The Bible is a book that mostly deals with indefinite periods of time. These indefinite periods of time are called ages and include this age and the ages to come (Ephesians 2:7). It says very little about unending time in the future (i.e., what we usually conceive as "eternity"), but we speculate that this unending time might "begin," as it were, after the last resurrection (i.e., "the end") when God becomes all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). So, in the Bible, when God is referred to as the "everlasting" or "eternal" God, it is primarily speaking about His existence, reign, and sovereignty throughout these ages, although He is in fact God unbeginning and unending, and His reign and sovereignty are indeed unbeginning and unending (Hebrews 1:11-12). The same reasoning can be applied to Revelation 22:5 where it says that His servants shall reign for ever and ever. They only reign with Christ until "the end" (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Now, regarding the word "punishment," this word does not refer to some terrible vindictive punishment, but to acts done for the sake of correcting the punished. In other words, it is synonymous with "chastisement."

The verb form of the word is used in Acts 4:21: "So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done." The punishment here clearly meant to reform them and deter others. The high priest and those with him intended to chastise them so that they would abandon belief in Jesus and return to what they perceived as the true Jewish religion.

The word "punishment" was translated from the word "kolasis" in all Greek manuscripts including the received text. Plato described its corrective nature as follows: "If you will think, Socrates, of what

punishment can do for the evildoer, you will see at once that in the opinion of mankind virtue may be acquired. No one punishes the evildoer under the notion, or for the reason, that he has done wrong only the unreasonable fury of a beast is so vindictive. But he who desires to inflict rational punishment does not punish for the sake of a past wrong which cannot be undone; he has regard to the future and is desirous that the man who is punished, and he who sees him punished, may be deterred from doing wrong again" (Protagoras Sec.324:

<http://www.bard.edu/library/arendt/pdfs/Plato-Protagoras.pdf>).

So, what about believers? Is the life they inherit only an indefinite period of time? If the only verse we had was Matthew 25:46, we would have to answer in the affirmative. This verse has in view an indefinite period of time that takes place during the ages. However, from other verses, we learn that they will receive immortality, so they do indeed inherit unending life (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Therefore, to conclude this discussion on Matthew 25:46, God does punish unbelievers, but His punishment has a purpose and it will end when that purpose is accomplished.

Q2. Are there any Bible verses that teach that divine judgment is limited and remedial, rather than an end in itself?

Yes, there are.

For starters, the Bible is very clear that all shall be subjected to the feet of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:8, 1 Corinthians 15:25-28) and that every tongue shall confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11). Some people have suggested that the unsaved shall be forced into subjection against their will. But this doesn't make sense. The confession is made "to the glory of God the Father." How would forcing someone against their will be to anyone's glory? Furthermore, if they were forced against their will, the body might be subjected, but the mind would still be in rebellion. Surely from the point of view of God, forced subjection wouldn't qualify as subjection, for He is the one who "searches the minds and hearts" (Revelation 2:23, Psalm 7:9, Proverbs 21:2). Subjection of body and mind, with confession made to the glory of God, requires a change of heart and mind (i.e., repentance). Furthermore, after death is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26), "when all things shall be subdued unto him," God will become "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). This alone proves that divine judgment is remedial.

Judgment will be according to the law of God. Let's consider Romans 2:12-15. "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) In the day when God shall

judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." From this we learn that all unsaved sinners, both Jew and Gentile, are in fact under the law (Romans 3:19-20), for even though Gentiles may perish without law, they also have "the law" written in their hearts. Therefore, their judgment will not be according to the cruelty of those nations who did not know God, but based on God's standard "by Jesus Christ according to [Paul's] gospel" (v. 15). In the law, we read, "Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed: lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee" (Deuteronomy 25:3). Jesus also alludes to this when He says, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47-48). Judgment may be harsh or moderate, but in either case, it is limited.

Next, let's consider Zephaniah 3:8-9: "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent." These verses decisively show the remedial aspect of God's judgment. Although we find expressions such as "pour upon them mine indignation," "all my fierce anger," and "devoured with the fire of my jealousy," this judgment is not an end in itself. While God is showing His wrath and making His power known (Romans 9:22), He is also using His anger to effect a happy reconciliation so that being subjected (Hebrews 2:8, 1 Corinthians 15:25-28), they might "all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent" (v. 9).

Let's look at one verse from the book of Revelation. In chapter 9:20-21, it says, "And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts." In Revelation 8-9, the angels are sounding their trumpets and pouring upon the people God's indignation (cf. Zephaniah 3:8), but we find that one of the purposes of the torment, death, and plagues is repentance so that the people stop worshiping devils and idols, and cease from committing murder, sorceries, fornication, and theft! Similar verses can be found in Revelation 16:9 and 16:11.

God's judgments are severe (Romans 11:22), but He "will not contend for ever, neither will [He] be always wroth" (Isaiah 57:16), for "his tender mercies are over all his works" (Psalm 145:9) and though He has "concluded them all in unbelief, [it is so] that he might have mercy upon all (Romans 11:36).

Q3. Doesn't the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 teach eternal conscious torment?

No, it doesn't. The story says nothing at all about the duration of the torment in Hades, which is translated as "hell" in the King James Bible. Therefore, it cannot be used to teach eternal torment. We learn in other passages of Scripture that God's divine judgment is temporal and corrective, so even if the story does give accurate information regarding a conscious intermediate state between death and the resurrection, such a state would be temporal. See my response to questions 1 and 2 for more information on temporal and corrective judgment.

The main issue regarding the story is whether or not it sets forth a conscious intermediate state between death and the resurrection. Much has been said on all sides of the issue, and going into depth here would be counterproductive, but for the sake of those who may be interested, I will make a few remarks.

First, the story starts off like a parable by saying "There was a certain rich man" (Luke 16:19), which are the exact same words used in Luke 16:1 and similar to the words found in Luke 14:16. However, at the same time, it identifies specific persons, namely, Abraham and Lazarus, which is something parables usually don't do. Furthermore, it uses figures of speech such as "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). If it were a parable, we would thus need to interpret the figures of speech to get to other figures, which we would then need to identify as to their meaning, thereby complicating things beyond the normal usage of a parable. Therefore, the story doesn't seem to be a real event, but at the same time, it has aspects that don't fit parables. I will give my interpretation on it shortly.

Next, there are several issues that arise if we take the story literally. For starters, a conscious intermediate state would contradict other

verses, such as Ecclesiastes 9:5, which says that "the dead know not any thing." Also, if the condition for entering bliss is to receive "evil things" while in the flesh, and the condition for entering torment is to receive "good things" while in the flesh, then Abraham himself would have been debarred from entering bliss and would have instead found himself in torment, for he was very rich (Genesis 13:2). There is nothing in the story that says the rich man was wicked, and we shouldn't just assume it. Likewise, there is nothing in the story that says Lazarus was righteous.

My understanding is that the whole story is the figure of speech called Admission, which E.W. Bullinger describes as "Admission of Wrong in order to gain what is Right" (Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, page 972). One of the examples he cites is 1 Kings 22:15: "Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king." Bullinger says that Micaiah through the use of Admission and irony admitted what was in Jehoshaphat's heart, and thus exposed and condemned it. I believe that Jesus was doing the same exact thing in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. In particular, on several occasions, He condemned the Pharisees and Sadducees for teaching the doctrines of men and invalidating the teachings of God (Matthew 15:9, 16:6, Mark 7:13). In the story, I believe that Jesus is reproofing them for their love of money by using their notion of the intermediate state, while at the same time leading them away from their false traditions and bringing them back to Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:29-31).

I could go into more detail about Abraham, the rich man, and Lazarus, but I would rather not do that here. However, in regard to some of the traditions that were believed by the Jews during the first century, Abraham's bosom is found in the funeral papyri and rabbinic writings (cf. papyrus Preisigke Sb 2034:11, Kiddushin 72b, Midrash on Lamentations 1:85). Abraham's bosom is also presented as the resting place of the righteous in 4 Maccabees 13:17. Based on this, we can understand why John said to them, "Bring forth

therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Luke 3:8). Their notion of the intermediate state is found in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah. It says in 9:1-5, "Then a great angel came forth having a golden trumpet in his hand, and he blew it three times over my head, saying, 'Be courageous! O one who hath triumphed. Prevail! O one who hath prevailed. For thou hast triumphed over the accuser, and thou hast escaped from the abyss and Hades. Thou wilt now cross over the crossing place. For thy name is written in the Book of the Living.' I wanted to embrace him, (but) I was unable to embrace the great angel because his glory is great. Then he ran to all the righteous ones, namely, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Enoch and Elijah and David. He spoke with them as friend to friend speaking one with another" (James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*). The "crossing place" could be the "great gulf" (Luke 16:26), which he crossed over escaping the abyss and Hades (cf. the place of torment in Luke 16:28). It also mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob praying for those in torments in 11:2-4 (Ibid.). I believe these citations show some similarities between the story of the rich man and Lazarus and the beliefs and teachings of the Jews in Jesus' day. For more information refer to Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg's website <https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/rich-man-lazarus-based-real-life/>, as well as the footnote on page 64 in Lesław Daniel Chrupcała's book, "Everyone Will See the Salvation of God: Studies in Lukan Theology."

To conclude, the story of the rich man and Lazarus definitely does not teach eternal torment and probably does not teach a conscious intermediate state between death and the resurrection.

Q4. Doesn't the Bible teach that repentance of sins is required to be saved?

No, it doesn't. But here's the truth: All people must repent of their sins! 1 Corinthians 15:25 says "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Everything will be brought under the subjection of Jesus Christ, regardless of whether it is now in this life or later in the next life. Therefore, it is only natural that there are passages in the Bible that command people to repent, turn to God, and do good works (Acts 17:30-31, 26:20). But reforming your life (i.e., turning from sin) will not save you. The Bible is clear: "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" (Ephesians 2:8-9), and "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Romans 11:6). "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Salvation is the gift of God. You cannot earn it. Repentance of sin plays no part in securing it. It is completely free (Romans 3:24). Think about how presumptuous and foolish it would be if someone gave you the most precious gift you could ever imagine, and instead of just being grateful and receiving it, you turn around and hand him an old filthy rag (Isaiah 64:6), thinking that you'll give him something in exchange. What an insult that would be to the gift giver! Instead of doing something so foolish, simply believe the gift giver and rejoice with thanksgiving!

Preaching repentance equates to a "do this or else" proposition. Repentance of sin is produced through threats and fear of impending judgment. This was so in the case of Nineveh: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). John the Baptist preached repentance through threats of judgment: "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance ... And now also the axe

is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Luke 3:8-9). This type of preaching may produce outward changes and stave off impending wrath, such as in the case of Nineveh, but as mentioned above, it does not and cannot lead to justification. On the other hand, the gospel is a proclamation of good news. "Christ died for our sins" is not a threat or an announcement of judgment. It is a message of salvation and peace, and it stands as a fact, whether believed or not believed. If believed, it often produces repentance of sin, but this repentance finds its cause in gratitude, realization of what is right, and freedom, rather than in threats and fear of judgment. It is very important to understand the difference between preaching repentance and proclaiming the gospel. The gospel is the only message that can produce justification. Since the gospel is not a call to action, but rather a proclamation to be believed, whose content does not depend on the actions of people, it is very offensive to the human mind (Romans 9:30-33, Galatians 5:11, 1 Peter 2:8, 1 Corinthians 1:18). However, we must not pervert the gospel by mixing its presentation with the requirement of repentance.

In the Bible, repentance is preached to Israel in particular. God's earthly people Israel are expecting a kingdom (Acts 1:6), but to receive that kingdom, they need to repent (Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19). That's why John preached repentance (Matthew 3:2) and that's why Jesus came preaching "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Yet, He was rejected and killed. The main theme of the Acts of the Apostles centers around preaching repentance to Israel, both to those in the land and those scattered among the nations. Yet, the apostles were rejected again and again. Peter, John, and those with them were imprisoned in Acts 4. Stephen was murdered in Acts 7. Paul was rejected over and over again. Finally, the book of Acts ends with Paul quoting Isaiah just like Jesus did in Matthew 13:13-15: "Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and

shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Acts 28:26-27). As a nation in general, they kept rejecting the message. Therefore, they still need to repent and will repent someday.

Q5. Isn't it necessary to submit to Jesus' lordship to get saved?

No, it isn't. One of the major purposes of Jesus death and resurrection is to show God's love in saving and reconciling sinners (John 3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 5:14-21). God's righteousness is manifested by the "faith of Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:22), thereby enabling us to "be justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24) in spite of having sinned and falling short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), and it is through Jesus that God justifies ungodly people who do nothing meritorious (Romans 4:4-5). God saves people while they are without strength (Romans 5:6), shows His love to people while they are still in sins (Romans 5:8), and reconciles people while they are still enemies (Romans 5:10), guaranteeing that they will be saved from wrath through Him by His blood (Romans 5:9). This is all to the glory of God so that no one may boast in His presence (Ephesians 2:7-9).

The fact is that Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 8:6). But when He came to earth, He had a special purpose. He came into the world to become Savior as described in Luke 2:11: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." We have all failed completely at submitting to His lordship (Romans 3:9-20, Romans 3:23), but that didn't deter Him, for He was born to save the world (John 3:17) and He is indeed the Savior of the world (John 4:42, 1 John 4:14). Although there are many sincere people who are zealous for God (Romans 10:2-3), these people must first recognize that Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). It is only then that they can begin to submit themselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Now, we know that all things will be subjected under His feet

(Hebrews 2:8) and that every knee will bow to Him (Philippians 2:11). Therefore, it would be wise to submit to His lordship as soon as possible. However, the only people who are currently able to do this are those who have His spirit abiding in them (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3), which is received by hearing the gospel of salvation and believing it (Ephesians 2:13). It is to people such as these that we beseech to "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Colossians 3:10).

To conclude, it is not necessary to submit to the lordship of Jesus to get saved. However, it would be wise for all saved persons (i.e., unreformed sinners who believed the gospel of their salvation -- cf. Romans 4:5, Ephesians 1:13) to submit to His lordship as soon as possible, for it is their destiny to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29).

Q6. Doesn't James 2:14-26 teach that works are necessary for salvation?

Yes, it does. But the salvation James is referring to is salvation from loss of rewards and regret at the judgment of believers (see my explanation below). He is not talking about the justification that a believer receives upon believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. All who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior are secure and cannot lose their salvation regardless of how they live (1 Corinthians 3:15, 1 Corinthians 5:5, Ephesians 1:13-14, Ephesians 4:30).

I will provide several points to consider regarding this passage:

First, James opens his letter by writing, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1). He does not refer to himself as an apostle (even though Paul call him an apostle in Galatians 1:19). Rather, he calls himself a servant, and this shows that his letter is more concerned with discipleship than authoritative teaching. He is not writing about "how to get saved." He is writing to believers. He refers to them as "brethren" 14 times in his letter!

Next, it should be noted that he is writing to the "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). His target audience are Jews who were dispersed from the Land of Israel. They have a heritage that includes law-keeping and they are looking forward to the establishment of an earthly kingdom in which those laws will be written on their hearts under the effect of the New Covenant promises (Hebrews 8:7-13). The letter of James was not intended for Gentiles (James 1:1, James 2:2 -- where "assembly" literally means "synagogue". https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_4864.htm). The Bible is very clear about the distinction between Jews and Gentiles with regard to apostolic teaching. This can be seen in Galatians 2:7-9 where Paul writes about his agreement with the other apostles: "But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the

circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." Gentiles must get their marching orders from Paul's letters. The gospel of the uncircumcision (i.e., Gentiles) was committed to Paul. There are useful principles and important truths taught in James, Peter, and John, but in terms of what is applicable to Gentiles, we must stay within Paul's letters.

Next, James 2:14-26 is in the context of the believers' judgment (i.e., a judgment concerned with rewards not punishment). In James 2:12-13, he says: "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." They are under the law of liberty -- they are saved believers! It is extremely important to see the connection between James 2:12-13 and 2:14-26. He says "and so do" with a view toward future judgment according to the law of liberty in verses 12-13 and then in the very next verses shows exactly what he means: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" Isn't it obvious that he is talking about the judgment of believers? This is about rewards, not punishment or loss of salvation. Can a life without works save a man from suffering unmerciful (v. 13) loss when believers are judged? No, it cannot! Paul speaks in a similar manner in 1 Corinthians 3:8-15 when he says "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" and "let every man take heed how he buildeth," and then goes on to explain what will happen on "the day" when the labor shall be revealed. Also, see 2 Timothy 2:11-13 where Paul explains that all those who die with Christ will live with him, but only those who suffer will reign with him. Not everyone reigns! The life we live now is important!

Finally, James calls the recipients of his letter "brethren" all the way up to the end, including five times in Chapter 5 alone. However, it is necessary to consider the appalling moral standard of these brethren. They had an untamable tongue and were full of jealousy, strife, battles, fighting, murder, and adultery! See James 4:1-10, in particular. Even the most "worldly" of Christians today would outshine these believers to whom James was writing! And yet he calls them "brethren" right up to the end in spite of what he said in James 2:14!

Q7. Doesn't Romans 10:9-10 say that we must confess Jesus to be saved?

No, it doesn't, if by "saved" we actually mean "declared righteous" or "justified." I will explain this in more detail below.

First, let's read the verses of interest in Romans 10:9-13: "That 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. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

In verse 9, confession comes before belief, but the logical order of actions is actually "belief" before "confession." This order is shown in verse 10 and proved beyond doubt in verse 14 where it says, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" Understanding this order is significant if we are going to correctly understand these verses. Based on this order, we can see that the one doing the confessing has already been declared righteous from God's point of view. Therefore, the salvation in view in verse 10 is not justification.

We often use the term "salvation" as a synonym for the word "justification." This is acceptable in many cases, but we have to be careful. In the Bible, there are many instances where salvation simply refers to deliverance from temporal troubles. For example, when Jesus told the blind beggar in Luke 18:42, "thy faith hath saved thee," He was referring to salvation from blindness. Another example is in Acts 27:31 when Paul says, "Except these abide in the

ship, ye cannot be saved." He was referring to salvation from the storm. Since we already showed that the salvation in Romans 10:10 does not refer to justification, it must refer to something else. I believe it refers to salvation from calamity in this life. To prove this, it is first necessary to show that it does not refer to the wrath that unbelievers will face when they stand before the judgment seat of God. Paul says in Romans 2:16 that a day is coming in which "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." It is on that day that "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" will be upon "every soul of man that doeth evil" (Romans 2:8-9). However, Paul also says in Romans 5:9 that "being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." So, we see that those who are justified will indeed be saved from the wrath spoken of in Romans 2, for we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, being justified by faith (Romans 5:1). Therefore, in Romans 10:10, when Paul speaks of confession being made unto salvation, the salvation he is talking about is from something that could happen in this life. In particular, I believe he is referring to the wrath that was impending upon Israel as a nation for not repenting and receiving Jesus Christ as their Messiah (1 Thessalonians 2:16, Acts 2:38). Peter spoke similarly regarding Israel in context of the day of the Lord, which is a day of calamity and wrath, when he said in Acts 2:21: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." He is quoting Joel 2:32, which actually says "shall be delivered." Deliverance from wrath in this life is how we should understand salvation in Romans 10:10. This makes sense, especially in light of the fact that Romans 9 to 11 deal with nations, with much of the discussion centering on Israel.

Therefore, to conclude, confession is not required to be saved, if by "saved" we actually mean "justified." In the context of Romans 10, we see that salvation refers to justified people crying out to God for deliverance from trouble.

Q8. Doesn't the letter of 1 John give us ways to test the authenticity of our belief?

No, it doesn't. John is writing to believers. He calls them "little children" nine times, "sons of God" twice, "young men" twice, "fathers" twice, "brethren" twice once, "beloved" four times. Furthermore, he uses the pronoun "we" 10 times and "us" 36 times. This should make it clear that John is not writing to people whom he doubts are genuine believers in order to have them test themselves. He is writing to people who are believers!

John begins his letter by stating his purpose: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:3-4). The purpose of the letter is fellowship and joy, and much of the content of the letter centers on how to achieve this fellowship and joy so that they can "assure [their] hearts before him" (1 John 3:19). John states plainly that "we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). He has no doubts concerning their future glory, but writes to them so that they "may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28). He wants them to have "boldness in the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17) and "receive a full reward" (2 John 8).

There are some similarities between the letters of 1 John and James.

First, John is also writing to Jews, not Gentiles. This accords with the agreement he made with Paul and Barnabas described in Galatians 2:7-9. When John says, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2), the scope of this statement includes each and every

person in the world, but the distinction is not between "believers" and "unbelievers," but "Jews" and "Gentiles." John was serious about upholding his end of the agreement that he made with Paul. Let's consider what he says in 3 John 7: "Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." It is unimaginable that he could be talking about believers asking for and receiving help from unbelievers (cf. Ezra 8:21-23). Rather, he is talking about Jewish believers and Gentile believers. Although, in spirit, there was "neither Jew nor Greek" in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28), during the early days of the church, the distinction in the flesh was still very strong (Acts 13:46, 15:2, 21:28, Romans 1:16, 11:11, 11:17, 15:27). In those days, preaching of repentance (Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19) and expectation of an earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6) were key points in the proclamation made to the Jews through what Paul called the gospel of the circumcision (Galatians 2:7). This expectation of John is further evident when he says it is "the last time," which literally means "the last hour" in the Greek, and speaks of the coming of antichrist in 1 John 2:18. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple put an end to the expectation of John and the rest of the apostles, but there will be a day in the future when Israel will repent, Jerusalem and the temple rebuilt, and their kingdom established, for "all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:25) and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:27).

Next, it is interesting to compare 1 John 3:18-21 with James 2:14-26, for John is dealing with the same exact issue, namely, that which concerns helping brothers in need. It is almost like short commentary on James. "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart

condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." The people to whom John is writing are saved. They are believers. That this is not a test of the authenticity of their belief should be evident from the expressions "assure our hearts before him" and "confidence toward God." He already told them that "when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2), so he is simply encouraging them to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith [they] are called" (Ephesians 4:1).

Another similarity is found between 1 John 4:17 and James 2:13. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). As I mentioned in my response to the question on James 2:14-26, the issue at hand here is not justification, but discipleship and rewards at the believers' judgment.

Moving on from the similarities between 1 John and James, I would now like to look at some of the more difficult passages in 1 John, such as those that deal with "not sinning" (1 John 3:9, 1 John 5:18).

Let's first look at 1 John 5:18: "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." On the surface, this sounds a lot like sinless perfection. But when we look at the passage in its context, we find that John had just said, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" (1 John 5:16a). From this and other passages like 1 John 2:1, we see that it is possible for believers to sin, although John speaks sometimes as if believers do not sin at all. In 1 John 3:9, he says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." When I read this, it made me immediately think of the New Covenant promises that God made with Israel. Compare this with what is said in Hebrews 8:8-13 where God talks about writing His laws on their hearts. At that time,

their "ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21). Compare this with 1 John 2:20 and 1 John 2:27 where John says, "ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" and "the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you." This definitely sounds like New Covenant language. We know that during the Acts period they had "tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come" (Hebrews 6:5), so it makes sense that John should speak this way.

Finally, let's take a look at 1 John 3:15: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." This sounds very similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:22: "whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." So, what are we to think about this? Again, I believe that John is using New Covenant language. Jesus intensified the law during His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), and it is very likely that this intensified law will be in effect during the kingdom period when Israel is under the New Covenant. At that time, judgment will be swift and severe and the dead bodies of executed criminals will be cast into Gehenna (i.e., the Valley of Hinnom, located just below Jerusalem) (cf. Isaiah 66:24, Mark 9:43-48). So, in one sense, 1 John is prophetic. It is anticipating the day when the New Covenant will be fully established. At the same time, however, it must also be applicable to those to whom he was writing. Notice that in 1 John 3:15, he uses the expression "eternal life abiding in him," whereas in 1 John 5:13 he says "that ye may know that ye have eternal life." It is possible to have eternal life (literally "life characterized by the age," as explained previously), but not abide in it. This is similar to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:30: "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." They are true believers who are saved and sealed, but that doesn't preclude the possibility of "grieving the holy Spirit of God." This is exactly

what John is talking about. They have eternal life, but this doesn't preclude them from not abiding in it.

Q9. Are you saying that believers shouldn't do good works?

Absolutely not. Believers should do good works. In fact, one of God's purposes in saving us for the ages to come is to do good works. Ephesians 2:7-10 explains God's purpose, how we are saved, and the subsequent life:

"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Believers who don't do good works in this life will surely do them in the ages to come when we receive our glorified bodies (Philippians 3:20-21). However, this knowledge is not a license to sin. Believers who persist in sin could pay a hefty penalty in this life and suffer forfeiture of rewards in the ages to come (1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Corinthians 3:15). In other words, all believers will live with Christ, but only those who suffer with Him (i.e., continue in good works despite difficulties) will reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:11-14).

What we are insisting upon is that salvation itself is not according to works that we do, neither at the time of experiencing our salvation nor afterward (Titus 3:5, 2 Timothy 1:9), but rather lies solely in "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

Works have nothing to do with salvation. Period. However, good works have much to do with discipleship and fellowship with God and each other.

Q10. Don't you think you're quoting Paul too much? What about Jesus?

No, I don't. Jesus specifically chose Paul to go the Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews): "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). He who receives him whom Jesus sent receives Jesus (Matthew 10:40).

Jesus is the Savior of the world (John 4:42, 1 John 4:14), but Jesus in the flesh had a special ministry that was entirely Jewish in nature: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Romans 15:8). While He was in the flesh, he was sent exclusively to Israel (Matthew 10:5-6, Matthew 15:24). The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke provide us with the teachings and acts of Jesus, but we have to remember that He often taught law as a way of salvation in those books (Matthew 19:17). He himself was born under the law (Galatians 4:4), yet He had the authority to intensify the strictness of the law and often did (Matthew 5-7). There are many precious principles and truths taught in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but the grace to be brought to us through the cross was not revealed in them, although they do contain hints of it at times. The gospel of John is an evangelistic gospel (John 20:31). However, we still need to be careful because it takes place in a Jewish context. Actually, there is much that could be said about the gospel of John, but doing so here could prove to be too lengthy. Suffice it to say, there is much grace and truth (John 1:17) in John's gospel that we could apply to our lives.

In light of the foregoing, Gentiles should really be getting their doctrine from Paul's letters. Paul repeatedly made his apostleship to the Gentiles clear (Romans 1:5, Romans 15:15-18, Ephesians 3:1-2, Ephesians 3:8, Colossians 1:27, 1 Timothy 2:7). And, in addition to

Paul bearing witness of himself, he also has the witness of Luke and Peter (Deuteronomy 19:15, 2 Corinthians 13:1). Luke spent nearly half of the book of Acts detailing Paul's journeys. Peter confirmed that Paul's writings are scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). The gospel of the uncircumcision (i.e., Gentiles) was committed to Paul by Jesus himself (Galatians 1:11-12, 2:7-8), and the apostles recognized it and made an agreement with him accordingly (Galatians 2:7-9).

Furthermore, Paul was the one who fulfilled the word of God (Colossians 1:25). It was Paul who revealed the mysteries of God hid from the ages (Ephesians 3:1-12, Colossians 1:25-27). Paul was the one who revealed the "one new man" (Ephesians 2:15) and our future glory of being seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). These are truths that encompass the whole human race (i.e., Gentile and Jew) and transcend anything God has ever promised to Israel, including the New Covenant.