

## LORDSHIP SALVATION & BAPTIST HISTORY

### What Have Christians Historically Believed?

By Pastor, Dr. David Downs

What must a person do to be saved? Is repentance a condition for conversion? Is submission to the Lordship of Christ an essential ingredient in saving faith?

### Unbelieving Believer?

Stanley, an SBC leader, in his book, *Eternal Security*, in the chapter about *those who no longer believe*, gives the following illustration. If a man goes into a tattoo parlor and gets a hideous tattoo and then walks outside into the light of day and then realizes he has made a mistake, what happens to the tattoo? Even though he wishes he had never gotten the tattoo, he still has the tattoo.

The same is said to be true for a person who goes to church and "gets saved". If he walks out of church and then later realizes that he made a foolish decision and that he doesn't really believe in God or the Bible anymore, well, he is still saved!

John MacArthur, to show how shocking the teaching of easy-believism can be, quotes R. B. Thieme, an author who promotes such easy-believism, as saying,

"It is possible, even probable, that when a believer out of fellowship falls for certain types of philosophy, if he is a logical thinker, he will become an 'unbelieving believer.' Yet believers who become agnostics are still saved; they are still born again. **You can even become an atheist;** but if you once accept Christ as savior, you cannot lose your salvation, even though you deny God!" (quoted in *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 105).

James the bondservant of the Lord tells us that faith devoid of works is a dead, non-saving, devils' faith (James 2:14). No-lordship authors have taken a most novel approach to interpreting James' words in an attempt to eisegete their heretical doctrine into the Scripture. Zane Hodges, a no-lordship author, writes that dead faith was once alive and that a genuine Christian can have permanently dead faith! (quoted by R. C. Sproul in *Faith Alone*, 164-165).

In response to this astonishing position of Hedges, Sproul, quotes the great Bible scholar, D. A. Carson,

". . . to the best of my knowledge **not one significant interpreter of Scripture in the entire history of the church has held to Hodges's interpretation** [*bold added*] of the passage he treats. This does not necessarily mean Hodges is wrong; but it certainly means he is probably wrong. . ." (*Faith Alone*, 165).

### A Damning Heresy?

Easy-believism is a heresy. . .no, it is a damning heresy. To teach that a person does not have to repent (turn from sin to serve God) to be saved is to go against Scripture and the history of Bible believing Christianity. To teach that saving faith need not be evidenced by works, and that a person can be saved by a non-working faith (James 2:14) is false teaching on core doctrine.

A faith which is void of commitment of life and submission to the Lordship of Christ cannot save; and to say that it can is to pervert the very nature of saving faith. To teach that a Christian can even become an atheist who denies God is, as MacArthur states, "a damning lie" (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, 105).

Do you feel the weight of that statement? "A damning lie!" Jesus said anyone who does not repent will perish (Luke 13:3, 5). Those who contradict Jesus teach the insane ranting of the figments of their own fertile imagination. How dare anyone contradict the Master? Jesus said, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). Easy believism says, "If you do *not repent* you will *not perish*."

Richard Owen Roberts warns us, "Any prophet, priest or preacher who claims to speak for God and says little or nothing about repentance in these desperately wicked days is certainly no spokesman for God, nor ought he to be trusted in other matters" (*Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel*, 54).

### **The Missing Debate**

The debate which should be raging in American churches and denominations today is the Lordship salvation debate. The difference is not semantics! There is a radical difference between "Easy-believism" and "Lordship Salvation". What is at stake is the gospel itself!

Many wise theologians have and are sounding the alarm, men like Spurgeon, Tozer, Ironside, MacArthur, Sproul, Boice, Wells, Horton, Dever, Roberts, and a hundred others are writing and warning us. Will we listen? I for one am listening.

Antinomianism destroyed Christianity in Germany. Bonhoeffer called it "cheap grace". He bemoaned the fact that everyone in Germany claimed to be an evangelical Christian and yet the majority of evangelicals supported Hitler!

Easy-believism also destroyed the revival in Wales under Christmas Evans. The revival did not reignite until the "Sandemanian heresy" (Named after the chief proponent of antinomianism in that day, whose name was Robert Sandeman) was wiped out.

Bottom line – antinomianism argues that a person can live like the devil and live with Jesus for eternity. He can live like hell and still go to heaven. That is the devil's religion – salvation from the penalty of sin while living in the practice of sin. You can have God and sin.

### **Wolf in Sheep's Clothing**

Antinomianism claims that it is "historic Christianity." It claims to be preaching the biblical doctrine of "sola fide" salvation by faith alone. **But the faith of antinomianism is not biblical saving faith.**

Make no mistake about it; the historic position of Baptists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and others has clearly been the lordship position.

The historic creeds state in a nutshell the historic theology of that group of believers. A brief overview of historic creeds of the major bodies of Christianity will prove that consistently, Baptists and other Bible believing Christians have been unified in teaching that saving faith produces works.

## Baptist History

In understanding and over viewing the historic Baptist position on the doctrines of "repentance", "saving faith", "perseverance" and so forth it is helpful and important to understand that the Baptists in America, while coming under various labels, all have a common root back to the English Baptists. The English Baptists were Calvinistic and Reformed in their understanding of the doctrine of salvation. They were a hardy breed and are represented by men like John Bunyan and Charles Spurgeon.

Until the last century Baptists were unified in their declaration that saving faith must be a working faith or it is no more than a devil's faith. One can scour the creeds and will find them empty of any support for the modern antinomian notion of "easy- believism". The unbiblical notion that a true believer, a true Christian, can live *a perpetual lifestyle of carnality*, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, while claiming to know God, is a fantasy.

Please understand, the issue is not whether a true Christian can commit a carnal *act*. The issue is whether a true Christian can live a carnal *lifestyle*. The biblical creeds of all Bible believing groups is resoundingly unified in saying μή (may genoito), God Forbid! A true Christian cannot live an unbroken lifestyle of disobedience (1 John 3:9).

Baptists have historically been unified with the rest of the Protestant reformers in understanding the Bible to teach this. Yes, salvation is by faith *alone* but the faith that saves is a repentant faith which *always* evidences itself, to varying degrees, in the fruit of holiness. Faith works.

## Didache

The Didache is a document from the end of the first century. "Every prophet who teaches the truth, but fails to practice what he preaches is a false prophet."

## The Schleithem Confession (1527)

This is an Anabaptist confession and clearly defines repentance. It reads, "We believe and confess, that, as the imagination of man's heart is 'evil from his youth,' and consequently inclined to all unrighteousness, sin, wickedness, that, therefore, the first doctrine of the precious New Testament of the Son of God is, **Repentance and amendment of life**. Gen. 8:21; Mark 1:15.

Therefore those who have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, must 'bring forth fruits meet for repentance,' amend their lives, believe the gospel, depart from evil and do good,' desist from wrong and cease sinning."

Baptistic theology goes back before the Reformation but we will begin here.

## The London Confession (1644)

This historical landmark confession written by English Baptists clearly states that true believers will never apostatize or become agnostics or atheists. "Those that have this pretious (precious) faith wrought in them by the Spirit, can never finally nor totally fall away; . . . That the same power that converts to faith in Christ, the same power carries on the soul still through all duties", "That all believers

are a holy and sanctified people, and that sanctification is a spiritual grace of the New Covenant . . . the believer is in truth and reality separated, both in soul and body, from all sin and dead works".

### **The Baptist Confession (1689)**

"Between the years of 1644 and 1648, an Assembly of Puritan Divines of England and Scotland had drawn up the Westminster Confession, which was and is highly esteemed by believers. But its church order was that of Presbyterianism, and Baptists differed from it on important matters such as the nature of the gathered church, baptism, the Lord's Supper and church government.

Hence, when opportunity arose, they drew up their own Confession of Faith, accepting the fundamental doctrines of the Westminster Confession but making such adjustments to, and correction of, that Confession" (A Faith to Confess, in modern English by Carey Publications, pg. 7).

This is the doctrinal statement of the great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

The chapter on justification states, "The faith which receives and rests on Christ and His righteousness is the sole means of justification. Yet it is never alone in the person justified, but is invariably accompanied by all other saving graces. Nor is it a dead faith, for it works by love."

The chapter on sanctification states, "Sin's mastery over them is completely broken; the evil desires to which it gives birth are increasingly weakened and dealt their death blow; and saving graces in them are increasingly enlivened and strengthened. The practice of all true holiness, without which no man will see the Lord, is thus promoted."

In the chapter on repentance it states, "The repentance that leads on to salvation is a gospel grace by means of which a person who is caused by the Holy Spirit to feel the manifold evils of sin is also caused by faith in Christ to humble himself on account of sin. This humiliation is characterized by godly sorrow, a detestation of the sin, and self-loathing. . . This renders the constant preaching of repentance essential."

In the chapter on good works it states, "Works which are truly good, and which are done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith."

In the chapter on perseverance it states, True saints "shall certainly persevere in grace to the end and be eternally saved, for God will never repent of having called them and made gifts to them. Consequently He continues to beget and to nourish in them faith, repentance, love, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit that issue in immortality."

### **The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833)**

Regarding the grace of regeneration, "its proper evidence is found in the holy fruit which we bring forth to the glory of God."

In the section on repentance and faith it states, "We believe that repentance and faith are inseparable graces . . . we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the **Lord** Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest and **King** . . ."

In the section on perseverance it states, "We believe that such only are real believers as endure to the end; and that their persevering attachment to Christ is the grand mark which distinguishes them from mere professors."

### **Abstract of Principles (1859)**

This Baptist confession of faith states, "Regeneration is a change of heart, wrought by the Holy Spirit, who quickeneth the dead in trespasses and sins, enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the Word of God, and renewing their whole nature, *so that they love and practice holiness.*"

In the section on faith it says, "Saving faith . . . leads to a life of holiness."

### **The Statement of Baptist Faith and Message (1925)**

The SBC issued a statement on the Baptist faith. In the section on repentance and faith it says, "We believe repentance and faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces . . . whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger, and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ, turn to God with unfeigned contrition and confession, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and King . . ."

In the section on perseverance it says, "All real believers endure to the end. Their *continuance in well-doing* is the mark which distinguishes them from mere professors."

### **Baptist Faith & Message (1971)**

"Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior." (Hobbs *The Baptist Faith & Message*, 1971, 55).

### **Doctrines Baptists Believe (1988)**

This book is the text used by Southern Baptists for their course in Baptist doctrine. Contrary to the easy-believism so predominant in modern SBC churches, it is crystal clear, as have been all Baptist statements of faith, that salvation is conditioned upon repentance and that repentance is a turning from sin to serve God.

"Wrong beliefs and wrong behaviors need to be changed. That is what repentance is all about. The New Testament word for *repentance* is *metanoia*. This word expresses three major ideas: a change of mind; a feeling of regret and remorse; and a turning away from sin to God . . . "Repentance means three things: first it means allowing God to change your mind. The only way God can bring cleansing and restore fellowship is for the unsaved person to change radically the way he or she thinks about right and wrong.

Second, it means allowing God to change your heart. The emotional basis of life is thoroughly regenerated. Feelings – not just intellectual knowledge – about right and wrong bring the redeemed person to hate sin as God does. Third, it means allowing God to change your actions. Salvation results

in a change of conduct. The redeemed person stops doing things that are outside the law of God. But more, the change is positive. The saved person starts living redemptively." (Edgemon, *The Doctrines Baptists Believe*, 78-79).

### **Conservative Baptist Doctrine**

Bruce Shelley writes, "Baptists stress preaching and *conversion* . . .

The second emphasis which arises from the Baptist concern for a fellowship of the twice born is conversion. In Christian circles, conversion refers to the **turning of a person from a life controlled by sin and self-will** to a life dominated by forgiveness and Christ's way. Baptists believe that men need to be changed by God's Spirit before they enter the fellowship of the church." (Shelley, *What Baptists Believe*, 11).

### **The CBA Declaration of Faith**

"We also believe that those who **repent of sin** and trust Jesus Christ as Savior are regenerated by the Holy Spirit . . . We further believe **salvation results in righteous living, good works** and proper social concern".

### **Erickson, Christian Doctrine**

"The negative aspect of conversion is the abandonment of sin. This is what we mean by repentance", "it involves an actual alteration of behavior", "The Bible's repeated emphasis on repentance is an incontrovertible argument against what Deitrich Bonhoeffer called 'cheap grace'" (*Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 308-9).

### **John Bunyan**

In saving repentance there is a "crying out under sin," "humiliation for sin," "self-loathing," "fear and reference," "saving faith will have good works to follow" (*The Narrow Gate*, 71-73).

### **Charles H. Spurgeon**

In his sermon titled "*Faith & Repentance Inseparable*" (Mk 1:15), he lists the characteristics of true repentance. These include: avoiding sin because of love for God, a thorough change of mind that leads a person to live like Jesus and to avoid the lusts of the flesh, weeping, mourning and godly sorrow.

It should be clear by now that those today in Baptists denominations who deny Lordship Salvation, who deny repentance as essential for salvation are either ignorant of or have betrayed their Baptist heritage. Their forefathers universally understood the Bible to teach Saving faith produces works and that trees without fruit are cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt. 3:8-12; 4:17; 7:19; 9:13; 13:41; 16:24-27).

### **Luther's Ninety-Five Theses**

"Yet He [*Christ*] does not mean an interior repentance only; nay, interior repentance is void if it does not externally produce different kinds of mortifications of the flesh,"

### **Philip Melanchthon (Reformer)**

"It must be obvious that if conversion to God does not happen and the heart continues in sin against conscience, that there is no true faith that desires or receives forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit is not in a heart in which there is no fear of God, but instead a continuing defiance. As clearly expressed, 1 Corinthians 6:9ff., 'Whores, adulterers, etc., will not inherit the kingdom of heaven'."

### **The Augsburg Confession (1530)**

"It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works . . . It is also taught among us that . . . true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel . . . Amendment of life and the forsaking of sin should then follow, for these must be the fruits of repentance, as John says, 'Bear fruit that befits repentance' (Matt. 3:8)."