

**QUESTION #4 – What is saving faith?**

Anyone who honestly reads the Bible must admit that it does say in many places that all one must do to be saved is “believe” in Jesus Christ. Repeatedly, the Bible does say that salvation is by “faith” (i.e. John 3:16-18; 6:35; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22, 26; 4:5; 5:1; Eph. 2:8).

In other words, the Scriptures state that the matter of salvation

**is not a matter of who a person is ;**

**it is not a matter of what a person is ;**

**it is not a matter of what a person does ;**

**it is not a matter of what a person feels ;**

**BIBLICAL SALVATION IS A MATTER OF WHAT A PERSON BELIEVES .**

**So when we crawl through the Bible it is obvious that having everlasting life is contingent upon believing in Jesus or having faith in Jesus Christ.** Now we tend to translate “believe” and “faith” as two different words, but in all reality both of these words are in the same family , except one is a verb and the other is a noun.

**The basic Greek verb used for “believe” (πιστεω) and noun used for “faith” (πιστις) all come from the same family. The Greek words mean to believe in something in the sense of trusting something and placing your confidence in something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 361-362).**

We can illustrate the simple meaning of these “faith” words by pointing out some places where they are used when not connected to the matter of salvation. One place where Jesus uses the verb “believe” is Matthew 24:24, 26. During the Tribulation, Christ says to Israel that they should not believe or trust or place their confidence in anyone who says they have found the Messiah on earth. So if someone came to one and said they had found the Messiah, one should simply say “I don’t believe that.” What I believe is that Jesus will come from the sky, not from some remote spot out in a wilderness.

In one other place, Jesus rebuked the disciples for not believing the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the testimony of two other disciples (Mark 16:11-14). The point of “not believing” was they did not trust or place their confidence in the fact that the testimony was true.

When we put these simple, Greek New Testament words in the context of saving faith, it is not complicated. We are very grammatically accurate to state it this way—**Saving faith means to place your trust and confidence in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins. Saving faith is what you believe in or trust in or place your confidence in to save you from your sins.**

Dr. Earl Radmacher made a very important observation and presents a critical truth we need to remember when he writes: “We need to beware of the tendency to add meanings to these words that they were never intended to carry” (*Salvation*, p. 119). The words “believe” in something and have “faith” in something mean just that.

As Dr. Radmacher said, “It is not our job to encourage people to have faith in their faith” (*Ibid.*, p. 19). It is our responsibility to proclaim that people need to have faith or believe in the object of their faith, Jesus Christ.

So the critical question one would need to ask and answer is “What do you place your trust or confidence in to save you from your sins?” “In whom or in what do you trust to take you to heaven?” To me the question based on the words is simple. You either trust in Jesus Christ to save you or you don’t. It isn’t complicated.

There is a very critical passage that actually deals with saving faith in the face of death that enable us to clearly understand the simple meaning of believe. The text is one I have used at funerals many times—John 11:25-26.

Mary and Martha’s brother Lazarus had died and the Lord Jesus Christ came to Martha and made a, as Zane Hodges called it, “majestic claim.” He claimed that He was the resurrection and the life and any who would believe in Him would live even if He died. Then in verse 26 he asked Martha “Do you believe this?” Believe what? The simple facts of what I just said. He doesn’t ask her to believe and make Him Lord of her life. He doesn’t ask her to believe and follow Him. He doesn’t ask her to believe and repent of sin. He doesn’t ask her to believe and promise to live right. He simply asks her whether or not she believes the fact that faith in Him will give her life?

So the facts are saving-faith facts. Whatever Jesus asked her to believe is enough to save her. What Jesus simply asks her to believe or trust was that He was the one who could save and give life. That is it. No more and no less.

Now when you look at **verse 27**, she gives us the answer about what she believed that saved her. She believed Jesus was the Messiah (the Christ); she believed Jesus was the Son of God (God) and she believed that Jesus was God come into the world to save us. That is what she believed. It is so simple, so uncomplicated and so right. She placed her trust in Jesus Christ to save her and any who do that “shall live even if they die.”

**Lordship salvation proponents make this faith business a complicated commitment to discipleship or Lordship. In other words, it isn’t just simple faith in Jesus Christ that saves; it is real commitment to Jesus Christ or real dedication to the Lordship of Jesus Christ that saves.**

But if you base what you believe on the actual inspired words of Scripture, here is the plain truth of the actual words that are used: **If you believe that by placing your trust and confidence and faith in Jesus Christ that you will be saved from your sins, you are saved. If you believe that Jesus Christ is the only one who can take care of your sin problem and take you to heaven, you are saved.** That is exactly what the words mean when they say “believe” on Him or have “faith” in Him.

This is not a question of what you do, have done or are doing. This is a question about what you believe. This is not a question about your promises or commitments; this is a question about your faith. **Saving faith is not about what we do at all; it is all about faith in what Jesus Christ did. The object of saving faith is not anything to do with ourselves; it is all about Jesus Christ.**

Charles Spurgeon told how sinners have such a difficult time believing that salvation is by simple faith in Jesus Christ. He told the story of his own life: “Oh, the many times that I have wished the preacher would tell me something to do that I might be saved! Gladly would I have done it, if it had been possible. If he had said, ‘Take off your shoes and stockings, and run to John O’Groat’s, I would not even have gone home first, but would have started right off that very night, that I might win salvation. How often have I thought that, if he had said, ‘Bare your back to the scourge, and take fifty lashes’, I would have said ‘Here I am! Come along with your whip, and beat as hard as you please, so long as I can obtain peace and rest, and get rid of my sin.’ Yet that simplest of all matters—believing in Christ crucified, accepting His finished salvation, being nothing, and letting Him be everything, doing nothing but trusting to what He has done—I could not get a hold of it” (Cited from Earl Radmacher, *Salvation*, p. 113).

All God says one must do to be saved is place all faith in Jesus Christ to do the saving work. Realize it is not about you or me; it is all about what He did on that cross.

**Now when it comes to what people believe will save them from their sins, proponents of Lordship salvation get dangerously close to trying to convince you to believe in yourself for salvation. They suggest that if you don’t see certain things there is no possible way you could be saved.**

The fact is I will not ever place my faith or confidence in me, because I know me. I will not trust in my promises or commitments to save me from my sins because I know what I am like. I am a sinner and I am not about to rely on anything in me or about myself to take care of my sin problem.

Any person, any sinner, anywhere in the world may determine whether or not they will go to heaven by simply answering a key question—“What do you place your trust or confidence in to take away your sins and take you to heaven?” If you place your faith in Jesus Christ to save you, you are saved.

Now one might ask how much faith do you have to have to actually be saved? Jesus specifically answered that question in Matthew 17:20; you don’t need a lot of faith, you just need a little of the right kind of faith in the right Person, Jesus Christ.

**QUESTION #5** – What is the actual history of the Lordship salvation controversy?

John MacArthur and proponents of Lordship salvation often appeal to church history to support their Lordship salvation position. In his book, he cites various people who he claims support his view (pp. 221-237). Dr. Thomas Lewellen observes that to many Lordship proponents “the evidence of history is regarded as having almost decisive value in the debate” (*Has Lordship Salvation Been Taught Throughout Church History?*, p. 153). But in examining this, Dr. Lewellen says we must ask two questions: 1) Is it true?: 2) Does it matter?

Is it really true that the unmistakable position of church history support the modern day view of Lordship salvation? If some leaders do seem to support it does it really matter? Does that make them right and free grace taught in Scripture wrong?

Now, those who hold to lordship salvation believe that saving faith includes obedience. So the real question of church history is whether or not those cited by MacArthur and others took their position.

This teacher has carefully examined the citations made from history by John Junior and what we may objectively observe is that he leaves out things that clearly say just the opposite of what he is claiming.

For example, one of his citations comes from Ignatius, who was the Bishop of the church of Antioch in Syria in the second century. Ignatius wrote a series of seven letters while traveling from Syria to Rome. MacArthur cites Ignatius on the subject of carnality to suggest that he believed in his Lordship salvation, but **he leaves out a critical part of the quote**: What MacArthur cites is this part: “Carnal people cannot act spiritually or spiritual people carnally, just as faith cannot act like unbelief or unbelief like faith” (*Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 222). MacArthur uses this quote to attack Zane Hodges in saying that it is impossible for one to be saved and persist in carnality. He says Ignatius agreed with him.

However, here is what the Ignatius quote says in its entirety: “Those who are carnal cannot do spiritual things, nor can those who are spiritual do carnal things, just as faith cannot do the things of unfaithfulness, nor unfaithfulness the things of faith. **Moreover, even those things which you do carnally are, in fact, spiritual, for you do everything in Jesus Christ**” (J.B. Lightfoot & J.R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 89). Ignatius disproves MacArthur’s very point. He claims that a carnal Christian could not accomplish anything spiritual, which is true, but that the Christian was still in Christ even in his carnality. The Christian is still in Christ even in his unfaithfulness.