

Perseverance, Faith, Works, and Theological Doubletalk

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

There are many today within the Reformed/Calvinistic circles that will openly acknowledge justification is by faith alone in Christ. However, their writings and theology seem to stress that a person's faith needs to be linked to an undefined amount of good works and commitment to righteous living in order for a person's justification to be valid. In Reformed Theology there is so much emphasis on works being connected to a person's faith that the meaning of justification by faith alone in Christ is distorted. This is because the Reformed definition of faith includes yielding, lordship, discipleship, commitment, works, and the dedication of a person's entire life to God. When works are linked to the meaning of faith then faith loses its simple meaning ("pistis" – firm persuasion, conviction, trust or reliance).

The Reformed teaching runs dangerously parallel to works, as a necessary requirement for salvation or justification, and their writings stress the necessity of works to the extent that justification would be impossible *without faith and works operating together at the same time*. In the Reformed tradition works are superimposed upon faith to such a degree that they become part of a person's salvation. A person begins to place confidence in their outward performance and perseverance as the sole determining factor of their salvation instead of only trusting in Christ.

Lewis Sperry Chafer used to say:

"I will go throughout eternity saying, I only trusted Christ."

Before we launch this study let us remember the old saying, "Error rides on the back of truth." This can be said of the Reformed doctrine of perseverance as it relates to good works. An overemphasis on works and linking works with the actual meaning of faith has resulted in teaching an extreme view of perseverance in good works as the sole ground of a person's salvation. This is the error that rides on the back of the truth - the truth being this. A regenerate believer will manifest a certain amount of

change and fruitfulness in his life that contrasts with his previous unregenerate way of living (Matt. 7:20; 12:33; 13:23; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 5:17; Eph. 2:1-3, 10; Titus 1:16; 1 John 3:6-9; 5:18). To deny this would be to ignore the plain sense and understanding of many Bible passages and commit “voodoo exegesis” with what the Bible actually says and teaches. Although not all Christians persevere in their Christian living, according to the Reformed definition and understanding of perseverance, they will still manifest a pattern of change and some signs of fruitfulness in their lives – some thirty, some sixty, and some one-hundred fold (Matt. 13:23).

We must understand that there is a difference between continual perseverance in good works within the Christian life and the evidence of practical change that is manifested throughout a person’s life. Not all Christians persevere as they should (2 Sam. 11:1-5, 27; Ezek. 3:20; Luke 22:54-62; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 3:1-3; 5:1-5; 11:29-30; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 5:8; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:17-18; 4:10, 16-17; Heb. 3:12; 12:5-8; 2 Pet. 1:9; 2:7; 3:7-18). Some of these examples do not strike me as Christians persevering in good works up to the end of their lives since some were prematurely taken from earth because of their sins. However, all Christians do manifest change in their pattern of living and conduct as the sanctifying work of God begins to work in their lives (Phil. 2:12-13). The point is this. Let us not become guilty of disproving the erratic teachings of the Reformed doctrine on perseverance in good works at the expense of missing what the Bible actually teaches regarding change in a believer’s conduct and living.

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

“If the man does not live differently from what he did before, both at home and abroad, his repentance needs to be repented of, and his conversion is a fiction.”

So, it is true that a person who is saved will manifest a certain amount of change in the pattern of his living and bear varying amounts of fruit in his life. Some have tried to avoid the reality of genuine change in a person’s regenerate life by countering with such questions as “How much fruit?” and “When will the fruit come?” These types of questions avoid the central issue that Christians have Christ living within them (Gal. 2:20) and will

manifest various amounts of change and fruitfulness in their lives (John 15:1-6). The absolute lack of fruitful living still does tell the story that a person is without God's life and nature (2 Pet. 1:1-4). A true Christian will not remain the same person that he used to be in his unsaved or unregenerate state. Generally speaking, those who are truly born again do live a different kind of life and different way of life in comparison to the unsaved (Jude vs. 19 – "sensual, having not the Spirit"). Their pattern of life will gradually change by the Spirit's presence (2 Cor. 3:17-18) and they will not live without any signs of regenerating life (1 John 3:8-9; Rev. 22:14). They will in some measure obey Him (John 10:27; 14:15), abide in Him (John 15:5-7), and walk in the light of His holiness (1 John 1:7).

All this is very true. But once again error rides on the back of truth. It becomes a grievous error to link a person's faith with works in order to try and pigeonhole every person into the same Reformed mold of perseverance. Adhering to a strict form of the doctrine of perseverance in good works has caused many Reformed writers and teachers to deny the existence of carnal Christians and link a person's faith with their works. This clouds the meaning of faith alone in Christ and the way of salvation by grace.

The purpose for this study is to reveal the common link between Reformed, Arminian, and Roman Catholic theologies concerning the doctrine of salvation or justification. The similarities in teaching may surprise you. In this study I will quote Reformed writers along with Arminian and Roman Catholic writers to try and sort out the confusion and theological doubletalk. Let's begin with some math problems.

Reformed Mathematics

Study these two Biblical arithmetic problems of the Reformed tradition and see if you can detect a difference in what they are teaching?

Catholic View (Faith + works = salvation)

Reformed View (Salvation = faith + works)

I have studied Reformed Theology for many years but in my opinion these two formulas are nothing more than theological doubletalk! There is no difference in these salvation equations. When you add them up they come out to the same thing – salvation by works (legalism). These are bizarre observations, and if it were possible, they would “deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24).

Perseverance According to Reformed Dogmatics

The Reformed doctrine of perseverance, *as it pertains to works*, takes perseverance to a legalistic level. Perseverance in Reformed Theology teaches that God creates works within the lives of the elect so that the elect can examine their lives for works and confirm their salvation. The works that the elect persevere in do not save them but confirm that they are the elect. The basic teaching goes like this. *Only as regenerate people persevere in good works can they know that they are saved and kept by God.* The preservation of God can be determined by the perseverance of the person. God keeps saved all those who persevere in good works since they are regenerate. Assurance of salvation can be determined through living a life of good works. As we persevere by producing an adequate amount of good works (how many we don't know) God will preserve us as His own children, since we have demonstrated that we are His elect. Therefore, in Reformed Theology perseverance in good works does become a *condition* for salvation or something that is *necessary* for salvation.

John Gerstner, a Reformed writer, readily admits this:

“...The question is not whether good works are necessary for salvation, *but in what way they are necessary.* As the inevitable outworking of saving faith, they are necessary for salvation.”

“Thus, good works may be said to be a condition for obtaining salvation in that they inevitably accompany genuine faith.”

Arthur Pink said:

“Reader, if there is a reserve in your obedience, you are on the way to hell.”

Chantry, another Reformed writer, similarly remarks: "Only when God is loved supremely and the spirit of the law kept has a man any reason to believe that he has been truly born of God."

John Piper, who claims to be a seven-point Calvinist, said, "No Christian can be sure that he is a true believer. Hence, there is an ongoing need to be dedicated to the Lord and to deny ourselves so that we might make it."

The conclusion of Robert Shank, a devout Arminian, sounds similar to Calvinism: "Keeping His commandments is not optional for men who would enter into life. It is an essential aspect of saving faith...There is no saving faith apart from obedience."

The Arminian Guy Duty says: "True faith reveals itself in continual obedience to Christ's conditions for salvation. There is no cleansing from sin and no salvation, without a continual walking in God's light."

The Catholic writer Fr. R. Creighton-Jobe said: "Eternal life is at once the free gift of God and something which we must earn for ourselves."

The Roman Catholic Church teaches in its official dogmas that salvation and justification is by works. The Council of Trent, which has been affirmed by many modern councils, including Vatican II in the mid-1960s, stated: "If anyone shall say that the ungodly man is justified by faith only so as to understand that nothing else is required that may cooperate to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is in no wise necessary for him to be prepared and disposed by the motion of his own will . . . let him be accursed" (Canon 9). And "If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy pardoning sins for Christ's sake, or that it is that confidence alone by which we are justified . . . let him be accursed" (Canon 12).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Rome's most recent authoritative and exhaustive study statement to her beliefs, says, "*No one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves*

and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life.”

The Calvinist, Catholic, and Arminian sound very similar in the ultimate outworking of their particular systems. They all agree that works are connected to saving faith in some way, making faith something other than simple trust in Christ, and that works are a necessary requirement in the process and outcome of salvation. In both cases salvation requires the production of good works. In both theologies salvation and good works stand and fall together. For this reason, I believe the fifth point of the TULIP theology of the perseverance of the saints in *good works* is proven to be at enmity with eternal security.

Earl Radmacher, President Emeritus of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, wrote: “I fear that some current definitions of faith and repentance are not paving the road back to Wittenberg but, rather, paving the road back to Rome.”

Reformed View of Salvation

The Calvinist in the Reformed teaching of perseverance claims that works come on the backside of true faith but are necessary for faith to be real. This conclusion leads the ardent Calvinist to backload the Gospel of grace with works. In fact, since works are necessary for faith to be real or genuine the Reformed system concludes that works, as the outworking of true faith, must also be *part* of a person’s initial faith in Christ. For this reason, a person must make a commitment to make Jesus their Master, become a servant of Christ, and promise to follow Christ all the days of his life at the time of his initial faith in Christ (Lordship Salvation). This is because faith (a working faith) is always linked to good works from start to finish. *Lordship Salvation/Calvinism seeks to weld together works with saving faith*. Faith is so intricately woven together with works that salvation must be offered to a sinner on the basis that his faith is willing to work or do something to meet God's approval (bargain with God, make commitments to God, etc). Today the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of saints in good works usually appears under the banner of Lordship salvation.

John MacArthur, a Calvinist and leading advocate of the Lordship Salvation position, says: “The signature of saving faith is surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ.” He also wrote in the first edition of the Gospel According to Jesus: “True faith is humble, submissive obedience;” and “...faith encompasses obedience. Faith is not complete unless it is obedient.”

The claim of the Reformed thinkers is this. When you tell someone to obey God and follow Him this becomes *non-meritorious* works that are part of all true saving faith, since faith is always confirmed with works. But these types of works never become *meritorious* works that result in salvation. They are simply the outcome or fruit of faith since regeneration has previously occurred in a person’s life before faith can even be expressed. Thus, the commitment and works that people promise to God, at their initial faith in Christ, are not meritorious works. This is because the people were already regenerated (saved) and their works were only following their regeneration. Strict Reformed Theology teaches that a person’s regeneration, faith, and works are the result of the operation of God upon their life and have absolutely nothing to do with a person’s response. Therefore, a person’s faith and works cannot be viewed as human works but the work of God through them. Hence, they are non-meritorious works. If a person can participate in the faith decision in any way (synergism) and persevere in works with their own power, then this becomes meritorious works and mixes works with salvation.

Does all this sound confusing to you? It does to me. In approaching people with this kind of evangelistic doubletalk we discover that the system of Reformed Theology backloads salvation with works by mixing works with the meaning of faith. Faith (trust or reliance in Christ) is linked to non-meritorious good works. But faith and its fruit (works) is something that occurs *after* regeneration has already occurred since a dead person cannot believe. Thus, a person must be made alive by the sovereign act of God and then faith and works (perseverance) will immediately follow proving the genuineness of faith. Reformed writers have always taught that faith and perseverance in works are necessary for salvation. **“But how are they necessary”** is the common reformed response.

Their ploy is that works are only necessary in the conformation of salvation and that the works that are performed in the elect are actually *non-meritorious* works that prove their regeneration has already occurred. This is the scapegoat that Reformed writers use to pass off the “salvation by works” philosophy. Thus, Reformed writers mix salvation with works but then whisper in the background, “You know what I mean.” Yes, we know what they mean! They mix salvation with works and distort the true meaning of faith by including works.

Their theory of regeneration before faith is theologically backwards (John 1:12-13), their alleged “non-meritorious” works doubletalk is not found in the Bible (2 Cor. 4:2; Titus 3:5), and their man-made Calvinistic system backloads grace with works by suggesting that the actual meaning of faith includes perseverance in works – a working faith (a faith that works). When works are added to faith in any way it diametrically opposes the simple meaning of salvational faith (Rom. 4:5). Furthermore, when works are brought alongside the grace that is related to salvation then grace becomes canceled out or set aside (Gal. 2:21; Rom. 11:6).

The Reformed view is called “*the perseverance of the saints*” which means that the saints always *persevere* in good works as God *perseveres* through them, creating good works in their lives, proving that they are one of God’s elect, and eternally *preserved* by Him. In other words, God preserves people (the preservation of God) as He causes them to persevere in good works (perseverance of the saints) and proves the genuineness of their faith and salvation. God in His grace creates these good works in the saint’s lives so they can persevere and prove that they are one of God’s elect people, and by these same works, they can also have the assurance and promise of the eternal preservation of God.

The Reformed writer Murray readily admits that works are included in salvation when he says: “Consequently the security that is theirs is inseparable from their perseverance. Is this not what Jesus said? He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.”

Lordship Salvation teachers and the Reformed tradition simply confuse the sign of salvation (works) by making it part of the way of salvation (faith)

which brings salvation into a person's life (Rom. 3:22; 2 Tim. 3:15; Gal. 3:26). The emphasis on salvation/assurance in Reformed Theology is hidden under the disguise of the "perseverance of the saints" and "progressive salvation" (human ability) but the Bible emphasizes the believer's positional salvation, which has already been attained before God through the perfection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 10:14; Jude 1) as the ground of assurance. It's this positional sanctification before God that brings the believer the peace and assurance of salvation (1 Cor. 6:11) – not his progressive sanctification.

Decisional Faith?

Reformed Theology also mocks the so-called "decisional faith." The notion that a lost sinner can place faith in Christ at a certain point of time and know that he is saved, by looking back at this time of salvation, is foolishness to many proponents of the Reformed tradition. Reformed teaching stresses that salvation does not necessarily come into a person's life by a specific decision to believe on Christ or a certain act of calling upon Christ. Scripture teaches otherwise (Acts 8:37; 16:31; Rom. 10:13; Eph. 1:12-13; Titus 3:5) and yet in the Reformed way of thinking there does not necessarily have to be a point of decision when a person accepts Christ as Savior or believes in Him.

R. C. Sproul, when commenting on a carnal Christian, says this: "The second danger of the carnal teaching is that people begin to think that all that is required to be saved is a profession of faith." What does Sproul mean by this statement? What is he implying? Is he implying that a person must work or live in a certain manner in order to meet the requirements of salvation, instead of expressing faith alone in Christ for his salvation? The teachers of Reformation Theology say, "No, a man is saved by grace." And yet, in the same breath they make strange statements like these, which confuse sincere readers and brethren, who want to have assurance of their salvation. The Reformed teaching on final salvation is no different from Arminian teaching, which says that salvation is not based upon mere faith in Christ; it is also based in some degree, or in some sense, upon the way that a person lives and acts.

Many Reformed teacher's stress that salvation is only *gradually realized* as a person recognizes his sin before God, and when he continually calls out to God asking for mercy, and when he commits his whole life to God in order to confirm his salvation. A person may possess salvation but they can never really be sure that they actually have it. All they can do is keep calling out to God for daily mercy and examine their life to see whether or not they have enough works to confirm their faith and salvation. In fact, true Reformed teachers cannot say when they were saved. And they claim that no person can know when he was saved. From the human standpoint salvation is a *process* and not a finished transaction.

The Calvinistic and Reformed president of Family Radio, Harold Camping, wrote a book entitled: "What Must I Do To Become Saved?" The title is worth a thousand words for it implies that salvation is a process, which a person confirms over a period of time. At least from man's perspective, an individual can "become saved" over a period of time as he searches out the good works in his life, keeps calling out to God for mercy, and throughout the years he finally will come to the realization that he is *probably* one of God's saved elect, due to his desire to live differently and obey God. Of course, the Biblical question is not, "What must I do to become saved" but "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

In the Reformed way of thinking, salvation is like a man who is rowing his boat across the Atlantic Ocean. He is striving to get to the other side of the vast ocean and sees no end in sight. All he can do is keep rowing and keep hoping and dreaming of the day that he will reach the shore. I'm so glad that Jesus cuts through all the theological doubletalk and vagueness of Reformed Theology when He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47). How wonderful! A person can believe and know that they possess eternal life. Only believe!

Salvation does not come into our lives progressively nor is the realization or understanding of our salvation before God a gradual process that occurs over the course of one's lifetime. Salvation is an eternal transaction that takes place at a specific point of time – "For by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Each believer can know that they have placed faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and that they are trusting Christ for their salvation

(John 3:15-16). The question is this, "Am I trusting in Christ right now for my salvation?" If you are then you are saved. There is no process involved in the salvation experience. When a person places faith in Christ they can know that they are immediately saved from God's wrath or judgment and that they will be saved forever (John 3:36 – "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life"). There was an instant in which God "delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son" (Col. 1:13). There is an instantaneous divine transaction that occurs when a person places "his faith" (Rom. 4:5) in Christ and "is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). When a believer places their faith in Christ they can know that they cross the line and become a child of God (John 1:12).

Paul's account of his salvation experience and the Ethiopian eunuch all verify that one's conversion and the understanding and realization of that conversion is not a lifetime process. Rather, it is an instantaneous event that occurs when a person places faith in Christ (Acts 8:26-39; 9:1-16; 26). Both these men knew they were saved and that the glorious transaction of salvation had occurred at a specific time (1 Tim. 1:15-16 – "I obtained mercy"). Paul looked back on his conversion experience, when he had placed faith in Christ, and said that he was one prematurely born (1 Cor. 15:9). The analogy of physical birth to spiritual birth verifies that salvation is an instantaneous event like the birth of a baby from a mother's womb (John 3:1-7; James 1:18). When the baby comes out of the mother's womb it is born physically and when a person believes in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ they are born spiritually (John 1:13 – "Which were born" and 1 Pet. 1:3 - "hath begotten us again"). The new birth is an instantaneous event that occurs at the very moment a person places their faith in Christ ("them that believe to the saving of the soul" – Heb. 10:39). Believe it and sing, "Tis done, the great transaction's done, I am my Lord's and He is mine!"

These verses indicate there is a past tense of salvation when a believer is acquitted before God and saved from hell. But there is also a present tense of salvation that every Christian should experience in his life (Phil. 2:17) and there is also a future tense related to our salvation (Rom. 13:11). Reformed Theology seems to mix the past tense of salvation with the present tense of

salvation. They put both together in the same salvation mold forgetting that salvation from God's judicial judgment (deliverance from the penalty of sin) is for the unbeliever and occurs at a specific point of time when faith is placed in Jesus Christ for salvation (Luke 7:50 – “Thy faith has saved thee”). The present tense of salvation (deliverance from the power of sin) is for the believer and deals with living the Christian life. The salvation from the power of sin is a post-salvation experience where a believer places faith in Christ for victory and deliverance from sin (Gal. 2:20). This salvation is worked out in the believer's life and covers his entire lifetime of existence on earth.

Arminian View of Salvation

The Arminian takes the position that a person is saved by grace but then can *forfeit* his salvation when he chooses to sin. Here is some more doubletalk. Many teach that a believer cannot lose his salvation but he can forfeit it! Like the Galatians the Arminian Christian begins his life by the “hearing of faith” (Gal. 3:2) but then attempts to be “made perfect by the flesh” (Gal. 3:3). According to the Arminian way of thinking there is no such teaching as “Once saved always saved.” This is because man has his own free will and can counteract the inward schooling of God's grace upon his heart and life. He can choose to reject God's persevering grace, which enables a person to continue in good works, and as a result he can lose his salvation because of his lack of perseverance. For the Arminian the human will remains free and because of this he may rescind his earlier faith in Christ by choosing to sin and forfeit his salvation. Arminianism actually teaches *conditional perseverance* which can result in the believer losing his salvation when he fails to persevere as he should. This is opposite of Calvinism which teaches that believers always persevere in good works by God's enabling grace. The Calvinist Christian demonstrates by his perseverance in good works that he is saved and that God will keep him secure as He promised.

The Arminian teaches that believers can turn away from grace and be lost. The grace that has saved a person does not keep a person saved. A man's good works are necessary to maintain a position of salvation before God. In the outworking of this system salvation by grace is also backloaded with

works. Good works are necessary to maintain salvation (Acts 15:1 – “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”). Arminian doctrine is often a mixture of grace (the working of God) and legalism (the way of human effort) which in the end will “frustrate (set aside) the grace of God” (Gal. 2:21). A man cannot cease from persevering in good works or else he will lose his salvation. This means he must do something or live a certain way in order to remain saved. Falling into some particular mortal sin may mean the end of the line. There is the ever-present threat of judgment hanging over the Arminian head. Is their life pure enough and what if they are not where they really should be with God? The thought of sinning, dying, and not receiving forgiveness looms in the background haunting the Arminian conscience (Heb. 10:2).

Catholic View of Salvation

The Catholic frontloads and backloads the Gospel with works (legalistic buckshot) by saying that good works are necessary in order to actually *merit* salvation and *maintain* salvation. Many of today’s evangelicals have an astounding ignorance of Catholic doctrine. Roman Catholicism teaches baptismal regeneration as the only way to remove original sin. It sees penance as a way to atone for sins committed after baptism. A person is involved in a lifelong process whereby he or she cooperates with the church in securing their forgiveness of sins. Sins are only potentially forgiven and must be worked off through a process mediated by the Roman Catholic Church and its sacraments over the lifetime of the believer. Grace is actually viewed as *graces* that are placed in a person’s life which enable an individual to obey and perform meritorious works that can earn their right to Heaven. Spiritual rebirth and justification before God is actually a lifelong process that begins at the sacrament of baptism but is achieved only through continual observances of the church sacraments and performing works of human merit. In Romanism salvation is a process and views works as “meritorious works” needed for salvation. Catholic Theology sees salvation as a joint effort between God and the sinner. Justification is interpreted “to make righteous” rather than “to declare righteous.”

So What's the Difference?

So what's the difference between the Reformed, Arminian, and Catholic theological systems of perseverance and salvation? I believe that you could put all these views in the same theological blender because they all mix grace with works to some degree. However, both the Arminian and the Reformed view of perseverance stops short of outright concluding that salvation is by human works, unlike the Roman Catholic teaching, which clearly boasts about a man's need for meritorious works (Rom. 3:27). What makes Reformed perseverance different than Roman Catholic Theology? According to many Reformed teachers, their theology teaches that the elect persevere in good works, not to be saved, but to prove that they are saved, to ensure a person that they are regenerated, and that God will preserve him. However, in Catholic Theology good works are necessary for the actual salvation to occur. *Good works are construed as part of the saving process.*

The Reformed view teaches that good works are a condition for salvation only in the sense that Christ creates good works in the lives of His elect people, and their change of living then becomes the work of God, not the work of man, which in return ensures the individual that God will keep him. Therefore, in Reformed Theology works can become a legitimate *condition* for salvation without being the actual *cause* of salvation. This is because God brings the elect to the place of change so that they can live for Him. Reformed reasoning stresses that God produces the works in the elect to make their faith real and therefore they are not man's works but God's works being brought to fruition in the life of the elect and confirm their salvation. Reformed Theology is forced to make the distinction between meritorious works and non-meritorious works in trying to explain the necessary role that works play in the salvation experience.

MacArthur makes the distinction between the alleged two types of works when he says: "Meritorious works have nothing to do with faith. But faith works (*non-meritorious*) have everything to do with it..."

Theological Doubletalk?

Does all of this talk sound confusing and contradictory? It does to me. In my opinion it's theological doubletalk! I believe that some Reformed teaching runs dangerously parallel to both Arminian and Roman Catholic teaching, which presses the need for works as a necessary *condition* for salvation. This is why so many people within the strict Calvinistic Reformed circles do not have the assurance of salvation through faith alone in Christ. They are constantly looking at their works and hoping their life measures up to the standard of God's true elect children. They are hoping they will have enough good works and manifest enough change in their lives in order to prove they are actually regenerated, and that God will keep them to the end, due to their perseverance in works.

Reformed Theology stresses the quality of a man's faith (works) instead of the object of a man's faith (Christ). Instead of only looking to Christ ("Look unto me, and be ye saved" - Isaiah 45:22; John 3:14-16) for the confirmation and assurance of salvation the Calvinist is looking at his human performance or works ("What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life" - Matt. 19:16). For this reason, those who strictly follow the Puritan and modern-day Reformed teaching on perseverance in works can only have "an assurance" of salvation but not positive assurance that they have eternal life.

R. C. Sproul says:

"Well, my question is, can even the one who is walking with the Lord and knows the Lord and is submitted to the Lord and is full of God's Spirit have such absolute certainty? He will have **an assurance** but that is not to say that there will never be any questions of doubt."

The famous Sproul proposition tries to pinpoint the major difference between the Roman view and the Reformed view.

Roman view (faith + works = justification)

Protestant view (faith = justification + works)

In other words, in Roman Catholicism faith and works *result* in justification before God whereas in the Reformed way of teaching faith will result in justification and works, the works *proving* that a person is one of the elect. God will continually create works in a person's life (perseverance of the saints) in order to prove their election is genuine and that He will keep His true children. Thus, a person's obedience is the result and cause of grace working in the heart and proof of the election of God. Without obedience there can be no salvation or assurance. In short, without obedience a person cannot be saved.

Conservative Reformed Theology would not view regeneration as a process and works as "meritorious works" for salvation, as Catholics teach. Nevertheless, Reformed teaching does impress upon people that good works are a work of God's grace operating in the life of a person. This ensures them that a person will persevere in good works, which in return demonstrates that a person is regenerated and one of God's elect, who will be ultimately preserved by God. Thus, works are a *condition* for salvation in order to confirm a person's salvation but not a *cause* of their salvation. In addition, a person's faith, which follows regeneration, will immediately be demonstrated by surrender and good works (Lordship Salvation) proving that it is a true faith.

According to the Lordship Salvation/Calvinism position, God will plant within a person's elective faith the outworking of surrender and good works and this will continue throughout their lifetime. Thus, faith and works are linked together in a harmonious relationship – the one (works) confirming the other (faith). A person's *subjective* assurance of salvation is then based on the good works (human performance) and not simply faith alone in Christ. Only as one endures or perseveres in good works (perseverance of the saints) can they know that their faith is genuine, that they are one of God's elect, and that God will preserve them (keep them saved) as His children.

Walter Chantry said:

"Since we read of self-deceived hypocrites like Judas, it is an imperative question. '**What must I do to be saved?**' is an altogether different question

from, '**How do I know I've done that?**' You can answer the first confidently. Only the Spirit may answer the last with certainty."

Chantry admits by this statement that faith alone in Christ is what is needed for salvation but then turns around and says that no one can really know if they have genuine faith since the examination of a person's good works can never give a person full assurance that they are saved. Thus, in Reformed Theology works play a vital role in faith, to such an extent, that faith is no longer simply faith (trust or reliance in Christ alone for salvation). Self-examination is overly stressed and faith gives way to a works/legalism salvation. In Reformed Theology a person knows that God gives eternal salvation to the elect. On the other hand, there is no way of positively knowing that one has it!

How comforting can it be to know that salvation can't be lost but not know that you really have it? *Whenever obedience is construed together with the understanding of faith it can only lead to legalism and doubt.* Thus, Reformed Theology teaches that without proper obedience (whatever this is) a person cannot be saved. Works become a necessary ingredient of faith. Works are superimposed upon faith to such a degree that they become part of the salvation experience.

Arthur Pink said:

"Conclude we, then, that holiness in this life is absolutely necessary to salvation, not only as a means to the end, but by a nobler kind of necessity - as part of the end itself."

"Holiness in this life is such a part of our salvation that it is a necessary means to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in heavenly light and glory."

Pink suggests that works are so intricately woven together with faith, and so necessary to confirm a person's salvation, that without good works a person cannot be saved. There needs to be perseverance in holiness and works as part of the salvation experience in order for a person to be saved. A person cannot be fit for Heaven without works. *Whenever we attempt to please God by the way we live in addition to having faith in Him for*

salvation, then it becomes a work on our part. All of these Reformed conclusions teach that works become vitally connected with a person's salvation whereas the Scripture concludes they are disconnected from our actual salvation. The whole point is this. The person is left to examine their works to see if their faith, which they have placed in Christ, was real or genuine. It leads them to look at their faith plus their works to determine their salvation. This is nothing more than legalism in disguise.

William Pettingill used to say:

“Salvation is by grace, through faith, plus nothing.”

Herein lies the problem. Reformed teachers never distinguish between the faith that brings justification into the life (Romans 5:1) and the result of faith, which brings a certain change of life following salvation (James 2:14,17). Paul argued for the **priority** of faith over works in salvation (Romans 4:5). James argues for the **proof** of faith in our everyday living. *James is saying that a genuine belief in the truth will produce a genuine behavior of the truth.* This cannot be overlooked without committing eisegesis (reading into the scriptures something that is not there). James is not placing emphasis upon works as part of saving faith or an essential part of the Gospel and salvation. To press the point that works or obedience is tied in with the word or concept of salvational faith is to miss the whole point that James is trying to make. **Works or obedience follows faith; they are not part of faith. We must allow faith to be just one thing – faith.** To state it simply, faith does not include works, but faith will always be evidenced by works. Reformed teachers confuse the *results* of salvation (works and obedience) and make them the *requirements* for salvation.

Cheap Grace and Easy Believism?

Reformed Theology concludes that if God's grace is not joined or linked to a system of perseverance in good works to authenticate and assure a person's salvation, then Christ's death becomes cheap or of no value. Saving people without human commitment and condition (Isa. 55:1-2; Rom. 3:24) supposedly distorts the purpose of grace, which is to transform people. So grace without works is called *cheap grace* and faith without a commitment to works is dubbed as *easy believism*. These are actually

expressions of mockery. In other words, if faith is nothing more than placing trust or confidence in the Lord Jesus to save you, then faith becomes too easy, insufficient, incomplete and of no value. Likewise, if grace has no human cost attached to it, such as the saints persevering in works through God's transforming grace, then grace has been cheapened or made of little value. In the Reformed way of thinking both faith and grace have lost their significance and meaning, they have been misrepresented and cheapened in some way, if they do not involve perseverance in good works. Man must persevere in good works (sanctification) if faith and grace are to maintain their entire Biblical meaning.

The problem with this conclusion is that the Biblical stages of salvation are fused together in one stage or package and are not kept in their proper sequence, order, and Biblical perspective. The Bible teaches that there is a past tense to our salvation (Luke 7:50; 2 Cor. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 1:5), a present tense to our salvation experience (Rom. 6:14; Phil. 1:19; 2:12-13; 2 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 2:19-20; 2 Cor. 3:18) and a future tense (Rom. 13:11; 1 Pet. 1:5; 1 John 3:2). ***Reformed Theology confuses becoming a Christian with being a Christian.*** This is a major flaw in the Reformed teaching that breeds so much confusion and misunderstanding among many sincere Christians who want to know whether or not they are saved. In trying to mix works with the simple meaning of faith (trust or reliance) the cart is put before the horse!

So let's get to the heart of the issue. When so much emphasis is placed on works, as the sole confirmation of a person's salvation, confusion begins to arise concerning the actual way of salvation. The Reformed way of faith can be summed up this way: "Seeing is believing." Although works can become a secondary confirmation and added encouragement to demonstrate that a person has been saved (2 Pet. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 John 2:3-4; 3:6-10) they should never be elevated to the point that they become the sole confirmation and underlying premise of a person's faith and salvation. The problem arises when we make self-examination the ground of our saving faith in Christ, the sole support for our assurance, and ultimately the basis of our salvation.

We must be very careful we do not fall into the trap of basing our salvation on the degree of our sanctification. This is what Reformed writers do as they stress the perseverance of saints in good works as the sole determining factor of one's salvation and assurance. The basis of our assurance must be in the promises of God's Word (2 Cor. 1:20) and not in the sanctification of our lives. When works are promoted as the only confirmation of a person's faith and salvation, it's then that works become construed as a *condition* for salvation, and the error of legalism once again raises its ugly head.

Some Concluding Remarks

There is a Biblical conclusion to all of this Reformed doubletalk. The conclusion is this. You do not believe, increase your faith, and possess assurance by looking at works; you believe, increase your faith, and possess assurance by looking at Christ (John 3:14-16; Isaiah 45:22). In the Gospel of John, the writer argues for salvation and assurance through belief or faith in the message of Christ (John 3:14-16; 3:36; 4:13; 5:24; 6:47, 54; 12:36; 20:31). Faith is different than works (Romans 4:1-5) and should never be used as an indication of a person's standing or acceptance before God (Rom. 5:1-2). We must conclude that varying degrees of good works, during or after the moment of faith, subtracts nothing from one's eternal position in Christ. Instead of clinging to the promise of eternal life (1 John 5:10-13) many Calvinists are clinging to the condition of their own lives (Luke 18:11). If a person only looks at the evidences of works in his life to provide himself with the assurance of salvation, then he will begin to ask himself these questions:

- How much evidence do I really need?
- How much is any evidence?
- Is my faith really genuine?
- Am I persevering as much as I can?
- To what degree must I change in order to really persevere?
- Am I going to be a defector in the end?
- Do I have enough faith in my own faith?
- Is my faith working enough so that I can know that I'm saved?
- Am I really saved?

When it comes to the salvation of a person we must keep works, surrender, Lordship, and bargaining with God out of the picture. It is faith alone in Christ alone! *Works follow faith; they are not part of faith (Gal. 2:16)*. There is a vast difference between works being a **part** of saving faith and works being the **proof** of saving faith. Furthermore, works are only a secondary verification of a person's faith. Let the Scriptures speak for themselves about faith, works, and perseverance.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says:

“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.”

There are some things in the Bible extremely difficult to misinterpret!

1. Salvation is by grace (God's unmerited favor). Salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned. It has nothing to do with works (meritorious or non-meritorious – *so-called*).
2. Salvation is through faith – faith alone in Christ alone! Faith is not linked to works. Faith is ceasing from works. Faith and works are contrasted. Faith is distinct from the works philosophy.
3. Works are the natural result of salvation by grace through faith. They follow faith but are not part of faith and give secondary confirmation and added encouragement of a person's salvation. Faith alone results in salvation whereas works are the fruit of salvation.

The Bible then concludes that faith alone in Christ saves and justifies a person before God's presence. It's faith alone - not works, or a faith that works, or an obedient faith, or a faith that must walk in holiness, or a faith that becomes a disciple and follower of Christ. No. It's faith alone without any works. Period.

Romans 4:5

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

Why all the theological doubletalk? Let's keep it simple.

“My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device nor creed.
I trust the Ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.

Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt.
A sinful soul I come to Him,
He'll never cast me out.

I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that he died for me.”