

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 4 November 8, 2015 Understanding the Warning Passages

Introduction – Why Deal with This Here?

Our next passage to deal with expositionally is Heb. 2:1-4, which is the first of 5 warning passages [Heb. 2:1-4; 3:12-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:26-39 & 12:25-29] in the book of Hebrews. Since there so many diverse views regarding the significance and meaning of the warning passages, I thought it would be a good idea to look at the main views and then, once we begin to encounter these passages in Hebrews, we will hopefully have a better comprehension of their purpose, and thus, have some idea why the author included them.

Although there are many warning passages in Scriptureⁱ, we will try to keep our focus on those in Hebrews. I want to alert you from the outset that the warning passages pose real challenges to interpretation of authorial intent, and as you will see, they relate to important biblical, doctrinal concepts like assurance, perseverance, works, apostasy and so on, and it is the interaction between these passages and what we know from the rest of Scripture regarding salvation that make it difficult to overcome our preconceptions and face the texts squarely to see what they are really saying first, then interacting with any doctrinal considerations.

The 4 Main Views + a 5th View

1. Loss-of-salvation view
2. Loss-of-rewards view
3. Tests-of-genuineness view
4. Hypothetical-loss-of-salvation view
5. Promises and warnings – God’s Means of saving His people

I unapologetically will admit that much of the detail in this lesson I have taken from 2 books – Ardel Caneday & Thomas Schreiner: The Race Set Before Us; and Thomas Schreiner: How To Win the Prize - alongside my own views from past teachings and other books I have read over the years. I will also admit that due to Schreiner and Caneday’s very strong arguments, I now hold position # 5 in the list above, and will explain why as we look at these views. A passage of Scripture which had intrigued me for years is Acts 27, and it ended up being a large part of the proof that led me to change my position from what it had been.

From the book I mentioned above, here is an excerpt:

“Some, believing the goal of the race set before us is salvation itself, are convinced that is necessary to persevere to the end in order to be saved. Others contend that perseverance is the evidence that one is already saved. Still others argue that the outcome of this race cannot be salvation, for they believe, the salvation issue has been settled already.

Therefore they argue that perseverance has nothing to do with salvation but only with rewards that even real Christians may lose without losing their salvation. Yet others believe that admonitions such as Heb. 12:1-2 indicate that it is possible for authentic Christians to fall away and perish forever. Some contend that admonitions indicate that all who are saved will persevere to the end and not fall away and that warnings address those who have fallen away, proving that they never truly did believe. Finally, some believe that admonitions say nothing concerning our salvation. These and many other differences exist among well-meaning believers who read the Bible to find encouragement and hope in living the Christian life.”ⁱⁱ

The Loss-of-Salvation View

Not all the views about the warning passages center on a direct loss of one’s [real] salvation, but this first one surely does. You may have heard this position stated if you have ever attended an Arminian church. According to this viewpoint, those who are truly saved by accepting Christ as Saviour, can, by forsaking Christ, by walking away once they have professed Christ, show a lack of necessary perseverance and patience in life’s trials and thus “fall away” and actually lose the salvation they had acquired.

I. Howard Marshall posits, “though the possibility of losing one’s salvation is slight on the whole, nevertheless it is a real possibility.”ⁱⁱⁱ The theological term for this is “apostasy”. Marshall takes his position from John Wesley, who held that every biblical promise of God’s preservation of His elect has to be qualified with warnings. For example, Wesley said that Rom. 8:28-39 – the most succinct and comforting passage on assurance of salvation (and a key proof passage to say that no true believer can ever lose their salvation) can only qualified by the warning of Romans 11:22. Thus, for Wesley (and Marshall), the Golden Chain of Redemption (Rom. 8:29-30) must be understood conditionally and Paul does not mean that precisely the same number of men who are called are justified and glorified.”^{iv}

A more modern scholar who argues for this position is Scot McKnight, and he focuses on the 5 warning passages in Hebrews. He believes that the warning passages do 3 things; (1) they interpret one another; (2) they address believers; and (3) they warn believers that they will perish if they forsake the salvation announced by the Lord in these last days. McKnight contends that apostasy in Hebrews is “deliberate and willful.”^v His underlying reasoning for this position is that (1) the warning passages are for believers; (2) the author of Hebrews conceives of salvation in terms of the future – IOW – believers partake of the present benefits and other aspects of salvation in the here and now, but may wander off the path before they experience eschatological salvation or glorification.

It is not my intention to interact deeply with these positions here, except to point out that more than a few passages describe salvation in a way that eliminates the possibility of ever falling away if one is a true believer. Cf. JN 10:27-30; Romans 8:28-39. Passages like this tend to refute this view of the warning passages noted above.

Loss-of-Rewards View

This viewpoint believes something tangible is definitely at risk in the warning passages, however, what is at risk is not salvation itself, but rather, rewards you may have earned on earth as a believer, then would have received in heaven (cf. I Cor. 3:15). This means that you will be saved but just barely if you fall into the things being warned about.

The main group that puts forth this position is the Grace Evangelical Society, founded by Robert Wilkin in 1986.^{vi} Their mission statement says, “The goal of GES is to focus worldwide attention on the distinction between the freeness of eternal life and the costliness of eternal rewards,”^{vii} Part of their support comes from notes in The New Scofield Reference Bible – especially this note at I Cor. 3:14, which is virtually the same in the Ryrie Study Bible / NASB: “Salvation is a free gift, but rewards, for those who are saved, are earned. The quality of our service (v. 13) is the criterion. Rewards are often spoken of as crowns.”^{viii}

Schreiner and Caneday quote the Scofield note;

“God in the NT Scriptures offers to the lost, salvation; and for the faithful service of the saved, He offers rewards. The passages are easily distinguished by remembering that salvation is invariably spoken of as a free gift (JN 4:10; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8,9), whereas rewards are earned by works (MT. 10:42; LK 19:17; I Cor. 9:24-25; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Rev. 2:10; 22:12). A further distinction is that salvation is a present possession (LK 7:50; JN 3:36; 5:24; 6:47) whereas rewards are a future attainment, to be given at the rapture (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12).”^{ix}

This group (and its followers, which are many) endorses, first of all, a radical “free grace” version of eternal security. They are the originators of “once saved, always saved” theology. They appeal, not only to the texts listed above, but to JN 6:37-44; 10:28-30 and Rom. 8:28-39 to declare that no one who is saved can ever lose their salvation – and we would agree with them on that particular aspect of their theology. The secondary aim is to defend the gospel against any intrusion of works-righteousness, but here they go too far, as they include repentance as one of those works. This is the Non-Lordship position that John MacArthur and others criticized in the 80’s and following, and MacArthur’s attack was mostly against Zane Hodge’s and his book, The Gospel Under Siege. MacArthur countered with The Gospel According to Jesus.

People associated with this position believe the warning passages are addressed to believers, but the threat is to eternal rewards, not to their salvation. R.T. Kendall comments that anyone who believes the gospel, “will go to heaven when he dies no matter what work (or lack of work) may accompany such faith.”^x

Charles Stanley – another proponent of this position - adds, “The Bible clearly teaches that God’s love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand.” He explains further, “Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, his salvation is not in jeopardy.” There is no danger of eternal condemnation because “believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation, for God remains faithful.”^{xi}

How about a warning found in I Cor. 6:9-10? Here’s Zane Hodges’ take on it;

“in speaking of heirship in I Corinthians 6:9,10, the apostle did not threaten his readers with the loss of eternal salvation. He did not even raise a question about their salvation. But he warned them plainly, that if they did not correct their unrighteous behavior, they confronted a serious consequence. They would not inherit the Kingdom of God.”^{xii}

This may sound like double-talk, but;

“Hodges and fellow advocates of this view distinguish between inheriting the kingdom of God and entering the kingdom of God. Hodges explains: “Many have assumed, without much thought, that “to inherit” the Kingdom must be the same as entering it. But for Hodges there is a great difference. He contends that entrance into the Kingdom is of grace, and therefore free, because it is based on Christ’s work for us. However, inheritance of the Kingdom is based on the merits of our deeds for Christ and thus is costly.”^{xiii}

I am providing a lot of background on this view because it is a popular one even today among many believers who do not really understand the implications of it and could use it to foster a lazy or apathetic demeanour about their faithfulness as a result, because they figure, even the least rewarded person in heaven is still in heaven. How bad could that be?

This view rejects the Arminian view (already assessed) and the Reformed (Calvinist) view. Robert Wilkin argues that the biblical warnings and “commands to persevere would be pointless if all believers persevere.”^{xiv} And “The Scriptures repeatedly command perseverance, but they never promise it. As a result, proponents of this view see salvation and perseverance in holiness as separate things. A couple of verses leapt to mind as I reviewed this view; Heb. 12:14 & Psalm 51:16-17.

Tests-of-Genuineness View

This is probably the most popular modern view of the warning passages. It is sometimes referred to as “developed Calvinism” and is closely related to Lordship Salvation. The premise is that many people profess salvation, but do not actually possess it, thus they are hypocrites by claiming to possess salvation and a salvation ‘experience’. But do not have either as a genuine possession.

The main points for this view are:

- (1) The warnings are addressed to professors of salvation in Christ who prove to be false or disingenuous in their confession of faith.

- (2) The threatened loss is not really a loss of something already possessed. The warning passages function as tests to prove the hypocritical 'believer' never possessed true salvation.^{xv}

Advocates of this position say (this is the position I held for many years) that though perseverance is necessary as evidence of authentic faith, perseverance has no role in the means of salvation, for then salvation would be of works and not of grace."^{xvi} Almost all of us would agree with this – John MacArthur's position. IOW – faith without works is dead. We are saved to do good works (Eph. 2:10; Phil 2:12-13, etc.). Faith is the root that good works grow out of, it is not a seed planted by our good works.

In this view, perseverance in loyalty to Christ and holiness (progressive sanctification) is the necessary evidence that one's faith is genuine. Cf. 2 Cor. 13:5; I JN 2:19; Gal. 5:22-23; Matt. 7: 21-23. I do not disagree with this aspect of this position.

Here are few quotes from advocates of this position: John MacArthur;

"Certainly Scripture seems to be filled with warnings to people in the church lest they fall away (Heb. 6:4-8; I Tim. 1:18-19; 2 Tim. 2:16-19)...But God does not contradict Himself. The warning passages do not negate the many promises that believers will persevere...And it might be added, the warning passages like Jude 21 reveal that the writers of Scripture were very keen to alert those whose hope of salvation might be grounded in a spurious faith. Obviously the apostolic authors were not laboring under the illusion that every person in the churches they were writing to was genuinely converted."^{xvii}

S. Lewis Johnson, commenting on Col. 1:21-23; (...*"if we remain in the faith"*)

"But what about the "if" we hear someone say. Is not the whole program in jeopardy? Does it not all depend on us ultimately? Suppose our faith fails? Now, we must not dodge the "ifs" of the Word. They are tests for professors. If faith fails, that is the evidence that the faith was not valid saving faith (cf. I JN 2:19). On the other hand, the genuine believer will persevere in the faith, not by human strength, but by divine strengthening...The ei (AV "if"), it may be noted, introduces a first class condition, determined as fulfilled. The apostle assumes that the Colossians will abide in their faith."^{xviii}

F.F. Bruce;

"If the Bible teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it also teaches that the saints are those who finally persevere – in Christ. Continuance is the test of reality."^{xix}

This view preserves the promise of security in Jesus Christ for everyone who truly embraces Him for salvation. It sees a warning passage such as Hebrews 5:11-6:11 as a warning to inauthentic 'believers' (and a very strong case can be made for that) since that would entail loss of their salvation and the subsequent impossibility of renewing them to repentance. Wayne Grudem comments that "*These warnings will often be the very means God uses to keep His own from turning away.* This does not imply that a true believer could lose salvation, but it does imply that the impossibility of losing salvation does not rest ultimately in

any inherent ability in the believer himself or herself, but in the power of God at work, usually in many different internal and external ways in the believer's life."^{xx}

Elements of this position are without a doubt an aspect of the position I now hold, which will be explained shortly, so I do not see any huge theological problems with this view – I just believe it needs to be enhanced in some ways to make it more helpful.

Hypothetical-Loss-of-Salvation View

This view is one that seems mostly attached to the warning passages in Hebrews, and although it is not as popular as the last view, it does resonate with many believers. It is an attempt to avoid the issues that adherents see in the other 3 positions.

“For advocates of this fourth interpretive viewpoint is that it contradicts biblical promises of security in Jesus Christ for everyone who believes. The problem with the loss-of-rewards view is that it minimizes the awfulness of apostasy, for, they insist against Hodges, an apostate is not a Christian. This fourth view also seeks to avoid two problems with the tests-of-genuineness view; its insistence that the warnings do not address authentic Christians and its retrospective reading of the warning passages in Hebrews. Contrary to Grudem's claims, the sin of apostasy that the author of Hebrews warns against has not happened; it is a projected, it is a projected supposition. Otherwise, why administer the warning?”^{xxi}

This view makes it clear that if a real Christian could apostatize, it would be impossible for that person to become a believer again. The warnings address genuine believers to correct the wrong idea that apostasy is not serious, as though one could bounce in and out of Christianity and Judaism without eternal loss.

Homer Kent wants to avoid the seeming contradiction between the warnings of Scripture and God's promises of security;

“Are true Christians ever guilty of complete apostasy? The Arminian says yes, and interprets this passage as denoting true believers who lose their salvation. Calvinists, however, recognise that salvation is eternally secure for believers, and interpret this passage in other ways. Some regard the apostates as mere professors who finally depart. It might be tempting to weaken the punishment so as to make it less than loss of salvation, but this expedient has not satisfied many in the light of the nature of the offense. A more reasonable explanation would seem to be that the passage warns true believers what the outcome would be if apostasy would occur.”^{xxii}

Those are the four main views of how we should interpret the warning passages. There is a fifth view, one I find more compelling because it seems to make the most sense of these passages and avoids the pitfalls of the other 4. This is the sense in which I will attempt to address the five warning passages in Hebrews as we go through the letter, so whether or not you agree once you have heard this view, or if you prefer one of the others, we can discuss that as we study each passage.

Promises and Warnings: God's Means of Saving His People

We have briefly reviewed the 4 main views, and here, is summarized the reason why these varying views have developed:

“None of the advocates of the four popular views arrive at their interpretations of biblical warnings on the basis of the warning passages themselves. Rather, they read the warning passages in view of their prior assumptions concerning the possibility of falling away and perishing under God’s wrath. Because they all seek to protect their prior conclusions...all four views fail to ask the right question concerning biblical warnings. We believe the right question concerns the function of biblical warnings in relation to biblical promises. This question does not seem to occur to those who adopt one of the four popular interpretations...”^{xxiii}

How is this view different from the other 4? The other 4 views tend to smuggle in theological conclusions to explain the warning passages. They do so maybe even unwittingly, based on their personal spiritual pilgrimage, and when they do, they impose a filter over interpreting these passages. For example, in the second of the other 4 views, the filter imposed is that you cannot lose your salvation, even if you never live like a Christian, as long as you have professed to be a Christian. Therefore, the passages cannot possibly be referring to someone losing salvation, so what does that leave for an object of the passage?

The best way to exegete the warning passage (or any passage) is to look at context, grammar, pronouns and to do the same with those passages of eschatological promise of salvation’s end – glorification.

“We believe that God’s promises have their own function, namely, to establish belief in the God who keeps His promises and to assure us that He is faithful to his people. We also believe that God’s warnings and admonitions have their distinctive function. They serve to elicit belief that perseveres in faithfulness to God’s heavenly call on us. Thus, God’s promises and God’s warnings do not conflict. Rather, the warnings serve the promises, for the warnings urge belief and confidence in God’s promises. Biblical warnings and admonitions are the means God uses to save and preserve his people to the end.”^{xxiv}

The warnings are prospective – looking ahead; not retrospective, looking back at something that has already occurred, such as apostasy. The warnings are meant to keep people from falling away. In such a sense they serve as kind of road signs that caution us of things we should not stray off of the narrow path to investigate or partake in. “They are written so that readers will heed the warnings and escape the threatened consequence...The purpose of warnings in the NT is redemptive and salvific. The Lord uses them as means so that believers will escape death.”^{xxv}

C.H. Spurgeon saw this aspect of the warning passages of Scripture;

“It leads the believer to greater dependence on God, to a holy fear and caution, because he knows that if he were to fall away he could not be renewed, and he stands far away from that great gulf, because he knows that if he were to fall into it there would be no salvation for him.”^{xxvi}

Conditional Promises and Conditional Warnings

Almost all biblical warnings are written in conditional language to express either a threat or a promise. Typically, the structure entails a dependent clause “if” followed by an independent clause “then”. Another word for conditional here is “supposition”, i.e.) rather than if, use the word, “suppose”.

There are two main types of NT passages – (1) conditional promises, and (2) conditional warnings and admonitions. For example, an example of a conditional promise is found in Rev. 21:6-7. The promise here is expressed conditionally, because receiving the thirst-quenching drink (eternal life) is conditioned on thirsting and inheriting all God has promised is contingent on overcoming.

This conditional promise elaborates the call of the gospel by inviting the believer or unbeliever alike to consider what extended belief results in for the one who is thirsty and the one who overcomes. So then eternal life, according to this conditional offer belongs to all who will believe and endure against trials and here, in symbolism is pictured as thirst that needs to be quenched.

Here is a second passage to consider – this time a conditional warning –Rev. 22:18-19. Now the condition “if...” expresses a warning (actually two of them in this passage). The consequence for those who “*add to the words*” or “*takes away from the words of the book*” is that “*God will add to him the plagues of this book*” and “*God will take away his share of in the tree of life and in the holy city...*”.

As is obvious from the examples above, there are two types of passages that form conditional results. One promises eternal life, and the other a risk of forfeiting that eternal life. The warning accompanies the promise by means of complementing it. For example, Rev. 22:17 reiterates the conditional promise of Rev. 21:6-7 which we looked at above. The verses that follow then in Rev. 21:8, and 22:18-19 sustain the idea that the conditional promises are corollaries^{xxvii} to the promise to warn that the gospel is intended for and will result in eternal life for those who endure to the end.

We need to hold a proper balance and tension between the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ aspect of salvation in Christ. The warnings and promises are prospective, displaying for us the biblical concept that although justification is an event, ultimately salvation involves a process we call sanctification, and that is progressive – called a walk or a race in Scripture, and we are admonished time after time to endure to the end, or to fight the good fight of faith, to work out our salvation in fear and trembling, and so on. The warnings and promises are designed to elicit faith which perseveres to the end in order to claim the prize of eternal life. We cannot observe our static condition of being saved now and suppose that we do not need to “press on” or “discipline our bodies” cf. I Cor. 9:26-27, or “strive” (“take pains” – ESV) cf. Acts 24:16, or “*lay aside every weight and sin to run the race with endurance*”. Cf. Heb. 12:1.

Even if we can't agree on which position I've presented here regarding the warning passages best fits the biblical facts, we must at least agree on two tenets of Scripture that are not negotiable; (1) we cannot lose salvation once it has been granted to us – cf. Phil. 1:6; JN 6:37-40; 10; Romans 8, etc.); and (2) as a result, we will persevere to the end because it is God who works in us to preserve us – cf. Phil. 2:12-13; I Thess. 5:23-24 & Jude 24-25.

But what does perseverance entail? Perfection? Works-righteousness or law-keeping? What is it about our profession of having been saved that gives us that “blessed assurance” that we will not experience the judgment of God? What do we observe in our life that tells us “yes, I really am a Christian. IOW – what does my perseverance look like?

I spoke to Scott Williquette when he was here in August regarding his position on the warning passages in Hebrews, since he mentioned that he had taught them in Peru. He graciously said he would email me his notes (100 pages or so) and he graciously did so. His position is I believe similar to the one I have presented here, and the key is to recognise that a believer, based on God's promises, will never lose their salvation, will persevere to the end and cannot possibly fall away. His notes are introduced by 30 pages on perseverance and assurance. He believes this is the foundation that must be laid in order to rightly comprehend the warning passages in Hebrews and in the rest of the NT. Again, I agree, and hence, we are now looking at this topic.

Perseverance

Is Not Sinless Perfection

We must not interpret the selected view of interpreting the warning passages to be saying that we must become sinless and perfect or we risk losing eternal life. If that were the case, then no one would ever achieve it. That's why we need a perfect Saviour. There is a vast difference between apostasy and sinning occasionally.

John, in I JN 1:8,10 emphatically tells us that believers do sin, and even provides a remedy for believers when they sin in I JN 1:9. In fact, I JN 1:7 seems to indicate that as we “walk in the light”, we are being cleansed from sin, so “walking in the light” cannot mean we are sinless as we do so. Instead, those who walk in the light are conscious of their continuing imperfection and hence, continue to confess their sins.”^{xxviii}

Paul, in Phil. 3:12-16 did not see himself as perfected but as “straining forward”, “pressing on”; and check out Romans 7:14-24 for Paul's admission of his daily struggle against sin, which it seems he was not always successful at winning, yet his end of life testimony in II Tim. 4:7-8 is clearly victorious, despite Romans 7, and Rom. 8:1, following along in the context of Rom. 7 is clearly connected to Paul's outcry against that sin.

“Those who are “mature” or “perfect” know that they cannot be perfect in this life. They are deeply conscious of their sin, pride, their selfishness, their irritability; their pettiness, their anger and their lusts. Still, they keep running the race, but not in order to obtain the reward by works. They run the race in faith, not trusting their own righteousness but looking to Christ for every good gift. Even if they fail and fall repeatedly, they do not quit the race. Instead, looking to Christ, they rise again and run to obtain the prize, trusting in the righteousness of the one who saved them, not in their own righteousness.”^{xxix}

What about James 3:2? “*We all stumble in many ways.*” All Christians sin – James says in James 4:7-8. Even the most godly believer is not immune to sin, yet we must never trivialize sin as if it has no meaning to God or to us, just because we can’t seem to conquer it.

It is also not the case that certain big sins will make us lose our salvation either. Consider David – guilty of adultery and murder, yet there is no question he is saved and in heaven now. Abraham was faithful, and saved, yet he lied twice about Sara being his sister, so he would not be killed. What about Peter? He denied Christ 3 times, yet Christ restored him as a result of his anguished repentant heart. His temporary fall was not a planned event as was Judas Iscariot’s. Peter is in heaven – Judas is not. Judas rejected his action, but did not repent or seek forgiveness, exposing himself thus as an unbeliever. And Scripture is clear that he was an unbeliever who “*went to his own place*” – cf. Acts 1:25.

So perseverance is not negated by certain sins, even horrible ones, so long as the believer’s life is headed in a direction that is indicative of faithfulness to Christ and trusting in Christ, even when we do sin. Faith that endures to the end is a faith that is the dominant design of a believer’s life, and is characterized by repentance.

Schreiner & Caneday comment;

“Each of the five warning passages in Hebrews contributes its own particular features to the sustained and escalating urgency of the call for perseverance. Yet, all the passages carry a singular message: promised salvation is the inheritance that comes only to those who, after entering into salvation, persevere in faithfulness to the end (Heb. 1:14-2:4; 3:11-14; 6:12; 9:15; 10:36; 11:39), for God reserves his promise until the second advent of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:28).”^{xxx}

Millard Erickson, wisely comments,

“The practical implication of our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance is that believers can rest secure in the assurance that their salvation is permanent; nothing can separate them from the love of God. Thus they can rejoice in the prospect of eternal life. There need be no anxiety that something or someone will keep them from attaining the final blessedness which they have been promised and have come to expect. On the other hand, however, our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance allows no room for indolence or laxity. It is questionable whether anyone who reasons, “Now that I am a Christian, I can live as I please,” Has really been converted and regenerated. Genuine faith issues, instead, in the fruit of the Spirit. Assurance of salvation, the subjective conviction that one is a Christian, results from the Holy Spirit’s giving evidence that he is at work in the life of the individual. And wherever the Spirit’s

work results in conviction that one's commitment to Christ is genuine, there is also a certainty on biblical grounds that God will enable the Christian to persist in that relationship, that nothing can separate the true believer from God's love."^{xxx}

Let's end this section by looking at I Pet. 1:3-5.

Perseverance is Not Works-Righteousness

OK, so perseverance is not sinless perfection, but does our obedience, as imperfect as it might be, play a role as any basis for our justification? Are we saved by grace, but then kept by our own works or efforts at lawkeeping? Obviously, obedience is a necessary component in the life of any believer – cf. Gal. 6:8; I Cor. 6:9-11; Rom. 10:16; 2:6-10; I JN 3:24, etc. And doesn't James say, in James 2:14-26 that faith without works is dead?

Romans 1:5 & 16:26 remind us that our faithful obedience comes through God's work in our lives. Even in the case of Phil. 2:12, we are not left without the additional and important information that it is God who works in us to perform His will in us and through us (v. 13).

Tom Schreiner comments;

“ Ultimately, our obedience is too paltry and imperfect to function as the basis for righteousness on the last day. Everything we do, as long as we are still in our mortal bodies, is still tainted by sin. Martin Luther was right in saying we are *simultaneously justus et peccator* ^{xxxii}. That is, we are justified and at the same time sinners. Our obedience could never function as the basis of our righteousness because God demands perfect obedience, and only Christ obeyed perfectly.

We are justified before God because we are united with Christ by faith, because we belong to the second Adam rather than to the first Adam.

It is correct, however, to say that obedience is necessary for salvation as the fruit or evidence of faith. This is how I understand the teaching of James. He does not teach that works are the foundation or basis of salvation, but he does remind us that works are absolutely necessary for salvation. They are the fruit or evidence of our faith.”

The life of a Christian is from beginning to end a call to trust in God to save us – to bring us into His Kingdom – cf. Jude 20-25. We are to ‘run the race’ to the finish line, looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2) as our righteousness and not to our own strength (cf. also II Cor. 12). To persevere means to keep clinging to our saviour till the race is over. “The call to perseverance, in other words, is a call to faith, not a call to work up the energy to make it to then in our own strength.”^{xxxiii}

Legalists are those who are consumed by their own lawkeeping, with a Pharasaical attention to the minutiae of crossing every T and dotting every I, but the risk is that the one who lives this way becomes consumed in their own ‘righteousness’ and fails to see how far short their efforts to ‘please’ God, really fall.

Note Gal. 2:15-21. Paul's argument here is that keeping the law can't bring anyone salvation and attempts to keep it rather than counting on Christ's righteousness as the ground of our faith (Rom. 10:1-4) make the death of Christ superfluous.

Again, Schreiner makes this point,

“Perseverance, then, consists in continuing to trust in the cross of Christ. Apostasy, in this instance, focuses on trusting human ability to keep the law and turning away from Christ and Him crucified.”^{xxxiv}

Genuine faith produces works, but those works are not the basis of our salvation, but instead are the evidence that our faith is real. Faith is alive and it will lead to obedience and we will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. Faith submits to the righteousness of Christ and sees oneself as crucified in Him, as “bought with a price”. Perseverance is not works-righteousness.

What it means to persevere is to keep trusting in Christ till the end, and Mark 9:24's message may fit right here as something one who is persevering might cry out: “*I believe. Help my unbelief!*”

To complete this already lengthy lesson, I am going to look at a passage which I believe illuminates this fifth position and shows us how this proposed interpretation plays out in a real-life situation in Acts 27.

ⁱ Just a short list (not complete by any means) – MT 10:32-33; JN 15:6; Gal. 5:2-4; Rom. 11:19-22; I Cor. 6:9-11; II Pet. 1:5-11; 2 JN 7-8; Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,21,21

ⁱⁱ Thomas R. Schreiner & Ardel Caneday; The Race Set Before Us – A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance; IVP Academic, 2001; pg. 20

ⁱⁱⁱ IBID, p. 22

^{iv} IBID, p. 22

^v Scot McKnight, cited IBID, p. 24

^{vi} Grace Evangelical Society has its own journal and a website where you can access numerous articles.

^{vii} Schreiner and Caneday, p. 24-25

^{viii} Ryrie Study Bible NASB, Chicago, Moody Press, 1978, p. 1730

^{ix} New Scofield Reference Bible, New York, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 1235

^x R.T. Kendall from Once saved, Always Saved, as cited in Schreiner & Caneday, p. 26

^{xi} Charles Stanley, from Eternal Security, as cited in Schreiner & Caneday, p. 26-27

^{xii} Zane Hodges, The Gospel Under Siege, cited in Schreiner & Caneday, p. 27

^{xiii} IBID, p. 27

^{xiv} IBID, p. 28

^{xv} IBID, p. 29-30

^{xvi} IBID – p. 31 – this is John MacArthur's position

^{xvii} John MacArthur, Faith Works, Word, 1993, pp. 179-180

^{xviii} S. Lewis Johnson, cited in Schreiner and Caneday, p. 32

^{xix} F.F. Bruce, *IBID*, p. 33

^{xx} Wayne Grudem, from an essay entitled, Perseverance of the Saints, in Still Sovereign, Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, editors, Baker Books, 2003, p. 182

^{xxi} Schreiner and Caneday, p. 35

^{xxii} *IBID*, p. 37

^{xxiii} *IBID*, p.39

^{xxiv} *IBID*, p. 40

^{xxv} Thomas R. Schreiner, Run to Win the Prize, Crossway, 2010, p. 48

^{xxvi} *IBID*, p. 49

^{xxvii} Corollary = supplementary or associated, or a proposition that follows from one already proved.

^{xxviii} Thomas Schreiner, Run to Win the Prize, Crossway, 2010, p. 53

^{xxix} *IBID*, p. 54-55

^{xxx} Schreiner & Caneday, p. 202

^{xxxi} Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, Baker Books, 1983, reprint 1995; pp 996-997.

^{xxxii} Run to Win...p. 71-72

^{xxxiii} *IBID*, p. 73

^{xxxiv} *IBID*, p. 75