

## Does Doctrine Really Matter? (Part 12)

Gnosticism and 'Eternal Security'

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In the first century following Christ's death and resurrection, John, Jude, Peter, and Paul were clearly writing against some who had come into the church "*unnoticed*," as Jude remarked. That is, they came into the church seemingly converted. However, it became clear only later that they had beliefs, and therefore far more serious practices distinctly different from what the Bible instructs.

From my point of view it seems that the enemy deliberately planted them in the congregation, just as Jesus taught in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares in Matthew 13. These invaders have been labeled by researchers as Gnostics—meaning *to know*, or *we know*. This is because of their proclivity to think, teach, and act as though they knew better than Jesus and the apostles. They claimed that they had special personal and individual understanding being revealed to them that was of a higher level than was given in the Bible by Christ and the apostles. At this higher level they believed it took them one step beyond the normal truly converted member whom they looked down upon as enslaved—enslaved to Yahweh, Hebrew religion, the Old Testament and its laws, and especially, it seems, the Sabbath. However, the reality was that their revelations were actually largely drawn from Greek philosophy and adapted in a hodge-podge manner to the Bible's truths.

These concepts were of this world. They were inspired by Satan and his horde of demon spirits. They were a decisive element in the first century church, and provided the apostles with much of the material we read in their epistles through their experiences dealing with them right in the church.

Now why did God deliberately see to it that what the Gnostics believed was preserved right on down into the end-time—this period of time just before Christ's return? Surely, I think the answer is clear that it is because of the principle of "what goes around, comes around," and that in the end-time the church would be faced by many of the same concepts as the first century church.

Turn with me to Revelation 2:6 and 7, to the message given to the church at Ephesus.

**Revelation 2:6-7** But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. 7 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the

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tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Turn now to Revelation 2:14-15 to the message given to the Pergamos church.

**Revelation 2:14-15** But I have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

These are admonitions for the *end-time* church as well as for the first century church, and two of them are directly warned about Nicolaitan Gnosticism. However, the admonitions do not end there with these two, because a reference to Gnosticism appears in the Thyatira message when Christ speaks of "the deep things of Satan."

When we were going through some of these evidences of Gnosticism, we did not go into the "deep things of Satan," and we will not here either, but that is a reference to Gnosticism.

An author, Barclay Newman, in *Rediscovering the Book of Revelation*, teaches that the entire book of Revelation is a polemic against Gnosticism. Now pay special attention to verse 7 where Jesus urges us to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches." In the Bible, "hearing" is directly related to "doing," and "doing" to "overcoming." There is a direct line between hearing, doing, and overcoming. If you do not hear, you will not do. If you do not do, you will not overcome. The process of overcoming begins with opening up the ears to hear in a manner that is designed or contributes to making the impact of the message really hit home.

Everybody—even the unconverted—has the power to hear spiritual truth to some degree. You do not have to be converted to hear and agree with truth, and so even the unconverted can hear spiritual truth and agree to some degree. Jesus is urging us to pay attention, and to listen carefully, because nobody among His brothers and sisters is going to be able to claim that he has not been warned that some aspect of Gnosticism is prevalent and dangerous at the end-time. It is not something that is passé. It is not something that is just in the past for the first century church. It is a something that is alive and impacting upon the end-time church as well.

We can understand from second- through fourth-century writings of the Catholic Church

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fathers, that by the time the first century had passed into history, the Gnostics were no longer within the church because they had largely been dealt with by being put out of the fellowship. However, that did not end their teaching, because after being put out of the church they formed into separate groups named after the leading teachers like Nicolas (the Nicolaitanes) and Simon Magus (the Simoneans). There was Valentinus, Marcion, and many others besides. They remained loosely bonded to false Christianity.

By the time the time the fourth century opens onto the panorama of history, the Gnostics seem to be gone. They were not completely gone, but they seemed to have passed into the shades of history. However, some of the principles, implications, sense, and spirit remain to this day, because the real author of those things is still alive and doing his best to destroy God's purpose.

Some of their wilder doctrines like docetism, their open hatred of Yahweh, the planetary arrangement, and astrology are no longer directly associated with Christianity, but their disbelief and rejection of the Old Testament, their belief in the immortality of the soul, the eternal security doctrine, dispensationalism, and above all, antinomianism, and especially their hatred of the Sabbath, are still hanging on, severely diluting this world's version of Christianity.

One of the passageways of Gnostic thought from the first century to today is the much ballyhooed Protestant Reformation. It does not stand alone though because the Catholic Church gradually formed following the first century, and adopted a number of Gnostic doctrines and continues teaching them to this day. To me this is a fascinating story. Augustine, of the Catholic Church, Martin Luther and John Calvin, among the Reformists, were the major vehicles for the transmission of Gnostic thought.

To most of us Augustine (the Catholics call him "Saint Augustine") is the least known of the three, but he is the one who laid the foundation for the other two. Augustine lived in the fifth century AD (the 400s—just about the time that Gnosticism was kind of fading from the scene as being an organized religion) which was about one thousand years before the Protestant Reformation.

Prior to Augustine's conversion to Catholicism he, for nine years, participated in a Manichean sect of Gnosticism, as what they called a "hearer." In other words, he sat in a congregation and *heard* what was going on. It is interesting that Saint Augustine lived with a woman at this time, but he never married, and he fathered a child by this woman. He apparently never became a member, but he was impressed enough that for a period of time he lectured on Gnostic philosophy. It was while engaged in this occupation that he converted to Gnosticism.

Even in his day he was a controversial figure amongst his contemporaries. His contemporary theologians of the Catholic Church openly accused him of introducing Gnostic teachings. However, he was a prolific and persuasive writer on theological subjects, and became very influential in that religious body. It was Augustine who developed the Roman Church's theories on church authority. This is the justification for using violence to enforce the church's will. Augustine's influence was of such magnitude that his papers led directly to many of the martyrdoms instigated in the Catholic Church persecutions during the Middle Ages.

We are going to look a verse that forms some of his argument regarding the use of force to enforce the Catholic Church's will.

**Luke 14:23** And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

How he could justify his conclusions based almost entirely upon this scripture is almost beyond belief. But it is not beyond belief when one realizes that by the time Augustine came along, the church already believed that the Catholic Church was the Kingdom of God on earth. Now with these two thoughts that the Catholic Church was the Kingdom of God on earth, and God's directive—"Compel them to come unto Me that My house may be full"—he wrote an influential article on the use of force. I say "influential" because his conclusion, combined with the fact that so many agreed with him, shows something about that organization that it is *of the world* and not of the Kingdom of God.

In the first place, the Greek word translated "compel" simply means "to constrain, whether by entreaty, force, or persuasion." Besides constrain, synonyms are "induce" and "oblige." It does not all by itself mean one must use painful arm-twisting methods, though admittedly that can be part of its sense. But in other places where it is used in the New Testament, it is not used in that manner; that is, where one of God's servants is doing it to somebody to make him become part of the church.

All one has to do to understand Jesus' intent in saying this is to look at Jesus' life and the apostles. How many people can you point to in the scripture that they twisted the arms of in order to make them become part of the church? There is no example at all that Augustine could draw upon. Jesus did no such thing.

Secondly, I want you to turn to John 18:36, where Jesus is on trial before Pilate. Notice what He said.

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**John 18:36** Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

That one verse—"My kingdom is *not* of this world"—should have stopped Augustine right there, despite what the Catholic Church claimed. So those who were really part of His kingdom, and still yet in this world, are not part of this world. They are not to fight, even as Jesus did not fight. The church is not of this world, and therefore it does not involve itself in this sort of worldly affair. What God wanted in this instruction was a good loving example, combined with true and logical persuasion from the scriptures to be the compelling force.

Augustine's influence did not end there. A second major contribution by Augustine to the Catholic Church was that he was a major force in establishing their concept of basing theology on church tradition. If you think maybe that this concept is no longer around, a young man recently wrote to me in an email that the Bible is a Catholic book. He meant that they can interpret the Bible as they please, and their interpretation will be true according to church tradition.

A clear example to all of us ought to be their teaching regarding Sabbath keeping. The Catholic Church's official position strongly asserts that if one searches the Bible, the only day the Bible authorizes to be observed is the Saturday Sabbath; therefore, the Protestants' keeping of Sunday as a weekly Sabbath rather than Saturday is based on Catholic Church tradition, not the Bible. They openly admit it is "Catholic Church tradition." They do not care what people think, because you see, the Bible is a Catholic book. It is not really the word of God, it is a Catholic book, and as they probably would look at it, the important writers of the Bible—Paul, Peter, John, Luke, Matthew—were Catholic. Was not Peter the first pope? Do you think that it stops with Peter?

Augustine's contributions to modern Christian theology did not end with those two works. It is interesting that as the Protestant Reformation was developing that both Martin Luther in Germany and John Calvin in Switzerland came up almost simultaneously with the doctrines of predestination and eternal security. Also interesting is that Augustine wrote two other treatises, one titled "On the Predestination of the Saints," and the other, "The Gift of Perseverance" in which he laid out of the foundation of the now Protestant doctrines of predestination and eternal security.

Now where did Augustine find his teaching? From Gnosticism, of course! Remember, he was fellowshipping with the Manichean Gnostics for nine years before converting to

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Catholicism, and those treatises had lain virtually dormant within Catholic Church vault until Luther and Calvin. Augustine was the only major Christian theologian to teach these concepts between the first and fifteenth centuries. Those doctrines, as they began to be taught by Luther and Calvin, like the Sunday Sabbath, are not to be found in the Bible. Neither is predestination there the way they taught it, nor eternal security.

There is a definition (I will call it that) of the word "heresy" that I would like to give to you. I think it would be good to know it, and it would be helpful to remember it. I am not going to be defining any particular word, but rather a generality that shows heresy's root and its drift. I am sorry that I cannot tell you where I saw it or who said it. That has slipped from my mind, but I remember what the person said, and that is: "Heresy is truth taken to a wrong conclusion."

**II Peter 3:14-16** Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation: even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him has written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest [twist], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Heresy almost invariably has a kernel of truth at its base, but the truth is strained and twisted into something that God never intended, and thus ends as a perversion of the original starting point.

Now does the Bible speak of predestination? Absolutely! Turn with me to Ephesians 1:4-5.

**Ephesians 1:4-5** According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

The Bible most assuredly speaks of predestination, and this verse is an example that the Bible imparts knowledge on this important subject, but it does not carry it anywhere near to the extent that John Calvin taught concerning its impact on salvation.

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The same principle is true of eternal security.

**Romans 8:28-32** And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose: For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

**Romans 8:38-39** For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These men will take these scriptures and others and build them out to where it is impossible for a person to lose his salvation. What they fail to explain is that there are a great many "ifs" (conditions) tied to those assurances that we just read when all the scriptures are brought to bear.

Let us consider this simple and clear illustration that is going to come right out of the Bible. There are scores of scriptures that I could have turned to, but this will serve as an introduction:

**Hebrews 2:1-4** Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip [and drift away]. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward: How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers [different] miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?

The subject eventually builds to the Israelites in the wilderness in chapter 3 and chapter 4. Now a simple question: Did all of the Israelites make it to the Promised Land? You

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see, that question answers itself. From our knowledge of the Bible, they did not. It is the same God. He could have just taken them into the Promised Land, sustained their lives to make sure that they would get there, but they did not. Now since the Israelites were types of Christians, and the Promised Land a type of the Kingdom of God, that example *alone* should have *warned* them that eternal security is not a valid doctrine.

**Hebrews 4:1** Let us therefore *fear*, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

Do you think Paul throws out warnings to people that are hollow?

**Hebrews 4:2** For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Jesus added to this. When the rich young ruler came to Him and asked, "What must I do to have life?" Jesus said, "*If* you will enter into life, keep the commandments." That is Matthew 19.

Both of these men linked these two doctrines together, thus teaching that salvation is impossible for one to lose. Their conclusion is today labeled by Evangelical Christianity as "irresistible grace." Both of these men had huge immoral skeletons in their closets that undoubtedly played a part in their doctrinal thinking.

Go with me to Matthew 7 where Jesus gives us a warning in verses 15 through 20. You know these scriptures well.

**Matthew 7:15-20** Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.

Now what kind of fruit did these men produce in their own personal lives? We are going to look at Luther, and then John Calvin.



History records that Martin Luther had a volatile and violent temper that led him into excesses of conduct, foulness of speech, morose depression, and guilty anguish to the point of mental illness. He hated Jews, was obsessed with the Devil, and believed in witchcraft. That he was courageous is beyond dispute, but he had an unstable and compulsive personality that led him into conflict with his spiritual knowledge. It was a conflict, brethren, that he never in his life resolved.

His ties to German political forces saved him from certain death at the hands of the Catholic Church. In other words, they protected him, but at the same time it obligated him to them. In turn, his teachings justified *them* to armed conflict, because for political reasons they wanted out from under the Catholic Church authority, and those wars resulted in the deaths of one hundred thousand German people.

John Calvin was no better. Though he did not possess the outward manifestation of an unstable personality, he was possessed with an unquenchable thirst for absolute power. He ruled Geneva, Switzerland with an iron hand, where he was the ultimate authority. He subscribed to Augustine's use of violence to compel peoples' obedience to the church.

Torture was commonly used to bring about the recantation of dissenters to his belief, and even though they recanted they were still put to death by being burned at the stake. He justified this by explaining that after they recanted, they were then suffering a righteous martyr's death as they entered into the Kingdom of God.

Of particular note is his putting to death of one Michael Servetus, a rival preacher who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and infant baptism. Calvin vowed to put him to death 1546. Calvin could hold a grudge, because he perceived Servetus' teachings as a rejection of him personally.

In 1553, seven years later, Servetus, on his way through Italy stopped in Geneva to hear Calvin speak. He was recognized and immediately arrested, and summarily put to death by burning at the stake. However, his burning was arranged to prolong his agony. Most people who were burned at the stake were dead within a few minutes from smoke inhalation and a combination of heat and so forth, but Servetus' burning, through the use of green wood, took him three hours to die. To Calvin's dying day, he claimed that Christianity owed him a debt of gratitude for riding the earth of such an evil creature.

Calvin responded to criticism by threatening to crush anyone who challenged his right to kill those who disagreed with him. He wrote, "Whosoever shall now contend that it is unjust to put heretics and blasphemers to death will knowingly and willingly incur *their*

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very guilt. This is not laid down on human authority. It is God who speaks and prescribes a perpetual rule for His church."

How many people did Jesus put to death? How many people did Paul, after his conversion, put to death? Or Peter, or John, or Jude, or Mark, or Matthew, or Luke? Were these leaders truly converted to and followers of Jesus Christ?

The Protestant Reformation was primarily a political reformation with some spiritual adjustments added to justify their actions. These three men—Augustine, Luther, and Calvin—were the primary, but they were not the only transmitters of Gnostic theology. John and Charles Wesley—the founders of Methodism—to their credit, rejected much of the Gnostics non-biblical theology, but still not enough to completely escape Gnosticism's evil influence.

Influence of these men and their doctrines was not merely to support, but to **enforce** antinomianism and dispensationalism, or for that matter anything that smacked of Jewishness, like the Old Testament. It is essential that we understand that their influence continues to this day. It is not as violent as it was then, but a subtle persuasion to their thinking is still there.

The influence of these men and their doctrines continues in modern theologians, some few which I will name in a moment, who are writing it seems books without end. Let me begin by quoting something that Martin Luther wrote, that again will reveal him to be a bridge from ancient Gnosticism to modern Christianity. This is preserved in a letter that he wrote to a friend in 1521.

Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your faith in Christ be stronger. No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery a thousand times a day.

Martin Luther was not advocating sin, but he was attempting to illustrate how strong God's grace and faith is. It is an absolutely stupid illustration supporting the doctrine of eternal security. He is saying that there is *nothing* that anyone can do to lose God's grace once it has been given to him.

This is exactly the approach of the Gnostic Nicholas, the founder of Nicolaitism, used in the first century when he offered his beautiful wife to any of the apostles for them to use sexually.

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This is very much like a parent telling his child, "Well Sonny, what you did was wrong, but that is okay. You can keep right on doing it because I love you." That approach shows no love for the child or for that child's victims.

This approach to Christian life will not work for a simple reason, because it presents human nature with an open door to sin, and human nature, unless it is restrained by faith, love, and fear, always follows the path of least resistance right into sin. That open door provides one with an option to indulge literally in the most bizarre, evil, and almost unimaginable excess without repentance, and still be saved. That is why Martin Luther said, "Go ahead and commit adultery a thousand times a day." That is stupid reasoning, because human nature will take that option. Human nature has to be restrained all the time. It is just like a spring that is waiting to spring out and do its evil deeds.

Within this picture it becomes evident that to these people mankind is not being prepared for anything. We merely exist for God to show His glory of how loving He is. What does the Apostle Paul answer? "Shall we sin that grace may abound?" "**God forbid!**" he says. "How can we, who are dead to sin, continue any longer therein?" Paul is saying that it is unthinkable that we should treat Christ's sacrifice and God's purpose in such a manner. Can you begin to see why they were so against Nicolaitanism?

I think Paul is the author of Hebrews. There is no proof of that, but to me it sounds like Paul. Listen to what Paul says in Hebrews 10:26.

**Hebrews 10:26-30** For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains **no more sacrifice for sins**. [How plain and clear can he get?] But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation ...[He is talking about the lake of fire] ...which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; Of how much sorer punishment suppose you shall he be thought worthy who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that has said, Vengeance belongs unto me, I will recompense, says the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

This series of verses here makes any thought that the Bible gives any permission whatever to anyone, under any circumstances, the option of sinning after coming under Christ's sacrifice, and then being graciously forgiven.

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Now what do popular modern theologians teach the ministry to teach **their** church members? Two such men who pastor churches, teach in university, and write books that you will find in your Christian bookstores are John Ankerberg and John Weldon. In a book they co-authored, titled "Knowing the Truth About Eternal Security," on page 30 they state: "To state that any sin, no matter how bad, can cause the loss of salvation, is to deny the infinite value of the atoning death of Christ." That is the exact opposite of what we just read that Paul wrote.

Another modern theologian, Charles Stanley, writes in his book titled "Eternal Security," page 109: "Saving faith is not necessarily a sustained attitude of gratefulness. It is a singular moment in time wherein we take what God has offered. 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."

My book in front of me says that "salvation is by grace through faith." And Christ asks the question, "When I come shall I find faith on the earth?" Is anybody going to be living by faith? Does anybody really trust Him?

Some modern theologians have taken to calling "eternal security" by a different name. In other words they have created a euphemism to blunt immediate rejection. To them it is now "Lordship Salvation," but it is still the same doctrine. It only has a faint disguise easily seen through by those who know what to look for.

Many of you have read books by John MacArthur who has a well-attended church in Sunland, California, which was not too far from where Evelyn and I used to live. John MacArthur is a leading advocate of this group—the "Lordship Salvation" thing, and he writes in his book, "The Love of God" on page 159:

Someone says, 'But can't Christians put themselves outside of God's Grace? What about those who commit abominable sins? Don't they nullify the work of redemption in themselves? Don't they forfeit the love of God?' Certainly not! It is preposterous to think that we can forfeit salvation by anything we do.

When a person in the United States is released from prison for having done something that was worthy of being put there, is then paroled and goes out on the street and does the same thing that he did before when he went into the prison, the public gets up in arms and says, "Why did they ever release that man?" That is the principle we are dealing with here. Is God so dumb like mankind is, that we release people before they

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are really changed?

Why do men like this choose to advocate such permissive doctrine? Even taking away the inspiration of Satan, the reasoning sounds suspiciously like the "no spanking; high self-esteem" childrearing concepts advocated so persuasively by the so-called experts in this field the last fifty or sixty years or so.

There are two directly linked ideas as to why they teach this. The first is because they want to avoid at all cost *fear* in the convert to Christianity. They believe that fear inhibits the convert's peace, joy, and unconditional love for God. That is one of those things that sounds good, but let me tell you a personal experience that I had.

In 1989 Evelyn and I attended the Feast in Palm Springs, California and I was to give a sermon. Before the Feast one of the leading men there was addressing the sermon and sermonette speakers, giving them counsel regarding their messages. One of the things that this man said to the assembled group there was, "Do not make people feel guilty." I ignored that instruction. If there is no guilt, there is no repentance. If there is no repentance, there is no change. There is a sequence that takes place in a human being that brings about change in a person. We have got to feel guilty before we will change. We have got to feel guilty before a standard that we know is high and mighty and pure in every way, and that we respect. But these theologians do not want people to feel guilty.

Now granted, obsessive guilt is not good. It is a form of mental illness, but a person who has guilt before God, and then repents, and changes, the guilt leaves because God heals the person's mind. But these people are not dealing with the God of creation, and they do not have that kind of experience, and so their solution is to make sure people do not feel guilty.

Now never mind that God makes it most clear very strongly and very frequently that He wants His children to fear Him. In this we get right back to the central issue in this whole sermon series. ***These people do not believe God's word.*** It is that simple. They think they know better. They are Gnostics! They know! They know more and better than God's word.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says very clearly, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter." Solomon writes at the end of the book. How can a person live before God so that his life is not vanity?

**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14** Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: **Fear**

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**God**, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Fear is a necessary aspect to the life of a Christian. Very simply put, these people do not understand either God or human nature. Human nature is going to fear something. It cannot be stopped, and because it is unchangeably self-centered, it will always fear, and therefore choose to stay in favor of its own self-interest; not the Creator's, but one's own.

The fear of God is a positive fear, because in the long run it always produces the most and best for those who have it and use it. God wants us to fear Him, because it is, along with faith and love, the strongest spiritual deterrent to sin, and therefore death—its inexorable penalty. Those are the big three in terms of obedience to God: faith, love, and fear; but one will only choose to avoid sin at all costs if one really knows God, trusts Him, loves Him, and fears Him.

These advocates of eternal security do not know God anymore than those childrearing experts who say that a child should never be spanked because its self-esteem will be destroyed. Well, according to God's word (and He created us), He says that is utter nonsense. We are not talking about beating a child. We are talking about spanking him in right measure.

The second idea the modern Evangelicals use to support their "once saved always saved" concept involves the misguided perception of God's unconditional love. They say that God's unconditional love **requires** that He never reject His followers regardless of any degree of sin. Again, this sounds suspiciously like modern child training experts. Always they counsel overcome your child's disobedience with what amounts to gushy love.

But now wait a minute, because a serious question must be asked. It is a simple question. Is their perception of unconditional love really love? Is it really love when one group of people—the so-called *saved*—is allowed to get away with any quantity and quality of behavior, while a second group—the *unsaved*—is going to be sent packing straight to an ever-burning hell for the *same* conduct the 'saved' group is doing? Think about that. That is so simple to consider. You come under the blood of Christ, you receive God's grace, and then you can do anything you want. But that poor Joe right next to you does not come under Christ's blood. He does the same things you do. He goes into the lake of fire. Say, "Goodbye" Joe! Do you not think there is something

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wrong with that? There is!

A second question though is: Is it really unconditional love to allow someone to form the habit of reckless self-centered behavior that is going to painfully injure or kill him, or others, and produce psychological stresses all along the way? The truth and logic demands of me that the answer is "No." That is not unconditional love. That is nothing but permissiveness. It is nothing more than a license to sin and to trample all over Christ's sacrifice as Jude said.

"Not so!" say the Gnostics and the modern Evangelicals. They say that removing the worry about sin and abolishing conduct as a requirement for salvation is a key to becoming "Christ centered." There is another one of those words! Now there is an interesting term. "Christ centered" sounds so spiritual. How many times I heard that in the late 80s and early 90s in the Worldwide Church of God.

A simple question now. What did **Christ** say? John 14:15. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." How simple is that right from the lips of the Master, our Creator? He is telling us what He wants. If we love Him, keep His commandments!

Now they say, "If you love Christ, you do not have to be concerned about keeping Christ's commandments." That comes from Charles Stanley's book, "Eternal Security" page 13 and page 15.

Listen to this quote from his book:

As long as I have an ongoing role in the salvation process, my natural tendency will be to focus on my behavior rather than on Christ. We are never completely free to fasten our gaze on Him until we are sure our relationship with Him is secure.

Never mind that the relationship is made secure when we do what Christ says, and not what Charles Stanley says. We are to keep the commandments, and so what they say is sheer nonsense that defies all true logic, human experience in the real world, and above all God's word. It is not Christ centered at all, it is **self-centered**, but it is the same idea that Nicolas and Luther had; Nicolas in the first century and Luther in the fourteenth century. It is the same basic teaching. These people are really against works! That comes out so often.

Paul said to Timothy:

**II Timothy 2:15** Study to show yourself *approved* unto God. ...

They hate the fact that somebody has to be qualified. Mr. Armstrong took a verbal beating for that. Brethren, he said that we have to qualify.

What does a judge do? A judge evaluates something, and says, "This is qualified, and this is not." All of us have to pass before the judgment seat of Christ.

**II Timothy 2:15** Study to show yourself approved [qualified] unto God, a *workman* that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Let us look at the real world here for just a moment. Suppose a worker, which is exactly what we are called here, did not have to be concerned about the quality of his work. Instead of reporting for work at eight o'clock in the morning like everybody else did, he came in any old time that he felt like it. Instead of working on the job he spent his time walking about the shop or the office talking with fellow employees. Instead of producing so many widgets a day, he produced far less, and instead of assembling or repairing a whole widget, he leaves parts out or repairs only one part, while several were defective.

How long do you think this workman would be approved and hang onto his job? He would get judged pretty quickly. That is what happens in the real world. We are talking about the *real world* here, and the issue is eternal life. The issue is being judged by God. The issue is passing His approval. If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. That pleases Him, because it is good for us.

These things are not the kind of level where you need to be a rocket scientist to figure it out. It is practical real world, work-a-day world, common Godly sense.

The advocates of eternal security realize that there is a serious weakness in both their logic and scriptural proofs, so in the past decade or so they have come up with another new term and explanation to meet the objection of those who see the weakness. Now the term is that there are "carnal Christians."

Again, remember a heresy is a truth that is taken to a wrong conclusion.

**I Corinthians 3:1-4** And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither



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yet now are you able. For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men? For while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are you not carnal?

Beginning with this single verse, an argument has been developed that people can be even totally depraved in their conduct so as to be indistinguishable from the unsaved, and not only allowed to continue fellowshiping, but will be saved in spite of their conduct.

I am going to quote Charles Stanley again. This comes from an audio tape Bible Study of I Corinthians. "You can't tell a carnal believer from a lost man."

Another man that many of you are reading his writing is Charles Swindoll. Be careful, brethren, he is one of these. Charles Swindoll said in an audio taped Bible Study of I Corinthians: "That explains how a Christian can steal and lie. That explains how a Christian can lack integrity and commit adultery and turn against the very things he or she once taught."

Robert Gromacki says in his book, "Salvation Is Forever," page 173 and page 174: "To an unsaved person or an untaught critical Christian, the carnal Christian will look like an unsaved person, I am sure, and may even be called such."

We will not go into the proofs of this, but you know Paul emphatically states in I Corinthians, just 2 chapters later in verses 11 and 13, "Get rid of that person out of the congregation! Do not let him fellowship with you."

And then in I Corinthians 6:9 he says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" That is so clear, brethren.

**I Corinthians 6:9-10** Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

How much clearer can you get? These people do not believe the Bible, so this latest argument, I think, illustrates maybe more clearly than anything how far from the truth

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these famous theologians are, and yet their positions are cleverly appealing to human nature, and people are led to believe them because that human nature in *them* wants, greatly desires, for God to be accommodating to their desires so that their path can be easy.

There is one more step to this that I will just introduce, and then maybe, God willing, the next time we will go into it a little bit. They have taken this thing one step further, and they say that man is totally depraved. He is not, brethren. Man is not totally depraved. I will show you that the next time.

This is as far as I can get this time, but, God willing, I will have maybe one more sermon on this subject. I am hoping, brethren, that you will be convinced that these people out there are not of God, and that we need to be very careful drawing upon their material. I mean **very** careful. They are led by somebody who is so slick. This is why Mr. Armstrong wrote that article, "What? Me deceived?" But he was an old man then, you know, and who could trust that old man's judgment? I am speaking sarcastically of course.