

Allegiance (Part 2)

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

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Continued from Part 1 of this essay.

IV. Allegiance to the Truth About Jesus (Faith in Jesus)

Salvation is conditioned on one's allegiance to the truth about Jesus, or what is commonly termed saving *faith*. Saving faith involves a *mental assent to the truth about Jesus*, leading to a *loyalty to the importance and implications of that truth for one's life*, including a *dependence on Jesus as the sole agent of one's salvation*.

As the above definition suggests, faith is founded on (but not exhausted by) mental assent, or the act of judging a statement or claim (i.e., a proposition) as being "true" instead of "false." To assent is to say, "I believe that this statement is true."

There are only a handful of such propositions mentioned in the Bible that are directly linked to salvation faith. As far as I can tell, all of these propositions deal either with Jesus's *identity* or with His *redemptive work*.

Examples of propositions concerning Jesus's *identity* include a number of verses in which we are told that salvation results when we believe that Jesus is *the Christ*, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament who would come and do the special work required to bring people back to God. Another proposition mentioned in various verses as being embraced in saving faith is that Jesus is *the Son of God*, a concept which is often employed to emphasize Jesus's unique relationship to God the Father.

"... these [signs of Jesus] have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31)

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1)

"this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 Jn 5:4-5)

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13) [to believe in Jesus' "name" emphasizes acceptance of his identity or title, as presented in the spoken gospel message]

Many times the title *Christ* is simply adjoined to Jesus' name (e.g., "faith in Jesus Christ") in verses dealing with saving faith, as in Acts 20:21 and Rom 3:22 seen earlier. The title *Lord* is similarly adjoined to Jesus' name in several verses naming faith as an explicit condition of salvation, as in Acts 20:21. Such verses suggest that to be saved we must accept the truth of Jesus' claim to be the Christ (i.e. the promised anointed One who would deliver from sin) and the Lord (i.e. our true Master, worthy of our obedience). Additional examples include the following:

"... nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in [into] Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal 2:16)

"... And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)

Sometimes the object of our mental assent is simply phrased as *Jesus himself*. The emphasis in these cases seems to be that we must accept the *uniqueness of Jesus as our only hope for salvation*--this hope is based on who Jesus is and what He has done to secure our salvation:

". . . that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16)

". . . And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."
(1 Tim 1:16)

A similar and yet more profound emphasis is found in John 8:24, where Jesus summarizes the prerequisites for salvation in striking terms:

"And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am [He], you shall die in your sins." And so they were saying to Him, "Who are You?" Jesus said to them, "What have I been saying to you from the beginning?"

One of the major concerns of John's Gospel is who Jesus is. John's answer to this question is structured largely around the various "I am" statements of Jesus ("I am the light of the world," "I am the bread of life," etc.). However, here in John 8:24 (see also John 8:28, 58, and 13:19), Jesus echoes the name of God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14 and conditions our salvation on acceptance of His most striking "I am" statement of all; namely, that Jesus is the eternal "I am" who existed before Abraham (cf. 8:28)--God Himself in human form. (Keep in mind that the pronoun "He" after "I am" has been supplied by the translators and is not found in the Greek.) Jesus' statement here takes us back to the very first verses of John's gospel, where John made clear that "the Word [Jesus] was God" who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:1, 14). Considered in context, then, John 8:28 suggests that in saving faith we must accept Jesus' claim to be God Himself, the great "I am" veiled in human flesh. This verse also emphasizes Jesus as being the unique object of our faith. In the act of saving faith we believe that Jesus, and no other, is the unique One, God the only Son (John 1:18), who has come from the Father to save people from sin.

Another important passage is John 11:24-27, where we find an intimate connection between the idea of "believing in Jesus" and the "believing that . . ." verses (see the groupings in the table of verses given earlier):

24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."

Notice that Martha gives propositional content to Jesus' words "believe in Me." To believe "in" Him involves believing *that* He is the Christ, the Son of God. That Martha's response was sufficient for salvation is confirmed by John 16:27 and John 20:30-31, among other verses.

In addition to the many verses conditioning our salvation on acceptance of Jesus' identity, we saw in the earlier survey that there are also several verses which make clear that we must believe in the facts of Jesus' *redemptive work*. This includes believing that Jesus was crucified and died for our sins (1 Cor. 1:21; 15:3), that He was buried and was resurrected from the dead (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:4), and that His resurrection was validated by various appearances (1 Cor. 15:5f). Actually, faith in the validity of Jesus' redemptive work follows logically from faith in Jesus' identity, for His identity is intimately linked to the redemptive mission He was sent to achieve (consider, e.g., His identity as the anointed "Christ").

To summarize so far, the Scripture suggests that faith as a requirement for salvation means to accept Jesus' identity as *God's specially approved agent (the "Christ"), uniquely related to the Father (where Jesus is described as the "Son"), our true and only worthy Master ("Lord"), indeed God Himself in human form ("the eternal 'I am'")*. Saving faith also involves believing in the validity of Jesus' redemptive work; namely that *He was sent by the Father to bring salvation to the world on the basis of His death and resurrection*.

By having focused above on the objective content of faith (Jesus' identity and redemptive work), I do not mean to imply that saving faith is *merely* mental assent to these facts. When one reads the New Testament passages pertaining to salvation, it is clear that mental assent in saving faith *follows through in embracing the importance and implications for one's life of the truths believed*. This element of *allegiance or loyalty* to the truth about Jesus is reflected in the fact that salvation is also conditioned on repentance and a willingness to follow Jesus, as will be discussed in more detail below. Repentance and submission to Jesus as Lord are the natural and necessary outworkings of genuine, heartfelt assent to the truths about Jesus discussed above.

But there is another even more direct sense in which allegiance is relevant to faith: genuine saving faith engenders a *trust or dependence on Jesus as the sole agent of one's salvation*. This biblical thrust is most clear in the scriptural warnings to Christians against pursuing salvation by one's own works of merit (e.g., Romans 4; Galatians 5:1-12). Consider Paul's words in Galatians 5:2-5.

"Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness." (Galatians 5:2-5)

Here Paul issues the Galatians a stern warning: If you seek to be justified *both* by Christ *and* by keeping the Law, then "Christ will be of no benefit to you," and you will be "severed from Christ." You cannot seek to gain God's acceptance by holding on to Jesus in one hand, while with the other hand holding on to the merit of your own good works. To be justified before God you must depend solely on Christ and His redemptive work on your behalf, and not trust your own merit, not even in part. As Vernon Bauer, the associate pastor of my home church, once remarked, saving faith requires you to "put all of your eggs in one basket; namely, *Jesus'* basket." The Christian puts all of his hope in Jesus and in no one else. If Jesus is not in fact the Savior of the world, then the Christian by his own choosing has no other hope to fall back upon. The Christian has abandoned any other possible way of achieving God's acceptance--his focus is on the sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice alone. This trust is necessary because it is impossible for us to morally merit God's acceptance.

As noted earlier, this dependence/trust is implicit in the various passages that speak of our faith (*pistis*) in Christ, and is highlighted as well in the many passages that talk about our *hope* in Christ. For example, Hebrews 6:18 speaks of believers as those

". . . who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast."

In the context of that chapter, the hope being spoken of is the hope that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham to save the world. This one hope, that Jesus is the only Savior, is like an anchor for our souls--He is the one thing that we put all of our hope in, the one thing that keeps our souls from wandering off into despair.

A Special Note On the Definition of Works Salvation

In the discussion above I pointed out the importance of placing one's faith in Jesus alone as the sole agent of one's salvation, and not depending even in part on one's own good works to gain God's acceptance. Trusting in one's own good works is often called "works salvation," and the Bible clearly teaches that no one can gain God's acceptance in that way.

I sometimes hear sincere Christians define "works salvation" as "doing *anything* to try to gain God's acceptance." This is *not*, however, what the Bible means by works salvation. It is clear from scripture that God asks, commands, and requires us to *do* something in order to be saved; namely, we must choose to have faith and allegiance, as discussed above. The question of works-based salvation versus faith-based salvation does not center around whether you *do* something, but instead whether you attempt to *morally merit* God's acceptance by obedience to God's Law. This is clear in all of the discussions of the danger of "works" in the New Testament. These discussions are always set in the context of God's Law, as in Galatians 2:16:

"Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.

At issue is whether a person can obtain salvation by meeting the moral requirements of God's Law. The New Testament writers consistently say *no*, for the simple reason that attaining salvation by one's works would require that one *consistently, perfectly* keep God's Law (Romans 2:7; Galatians 3:10-12; 5:3). The reality, however, is that "all have sinned" and fail to meet this perfect standard required by the Law (Romans 3:23). Those who fail to grasp this basic fact and continue to believe that God can (at least in part) accept them based on their own merits are guilty of what we refer to today as "works salvation."

When, however, I have faith in Christ for my salvation, this does not mean that I now morally merit my salvation. My act of faith *in itself* (i.e., considered apart from Christ's redemptive work) does nothing to improve my own personal moral merit before God. What my act of faith does, rather, is meet the condition by which God will then choose to begin considering me *in relation to Christ*. If God were still somehow to consider me in and of myself (i.e., apart from Christ), I would be just as morally repugnant to God and fall just as far short of meeting the moral demands of His Law *after* having faith as *before* having faith. Faith is not itself a "work" that has merit before God; faith is simply the response God requires before He will "justify the ungodly" (Romans 4:5). Faith, or what I have called allegiance to the truth about Jesus, is thus truly a *condition* for salvation, but it is emphatically *not* a "work" for salvation in the biblical sense.

At this point I will anticipate an objection that might be raised in connection with my discussion below of repentance as a condition for salvation. Some people have argued that even if faith is not a "work," the same cannot be said of repentance, which (they argue) clearly involves doing works of righteousness and therefore cannot be a condition for salvation. This, however, is to confuse "repentance" with the "fruit of repentance" (Matthew 3:8). Repentance itself is the act of submission to the lordship of Christ, and, like faith, is another aspect of the Christian's underlying attitude of allegiance to Christ, that wholehearted response of surrender to God that forms the basic condition of salvation. It is true that good works will naturally flow from this underlying attitude as God works in the heart and character of the one who has yielded allegiance to Him, but we must not confuse the underlying attitude of allegiance (which includes faith and repentance) with the fruit that follows from that attitude (i.e., good works and changed character). Thus, neither faith nor repentance are "works of the Law" as the phrase is intended in Galatians 2:16 and similar passages.

V. Allegiance to Jesus as One's Own Lord (Repentance)

In reference to salvation, repentance is the fundamental choice to turn away from an allegiance to self and sin, and in its place to submit one's allegiance to Christ as Lord. It is a commitment to make pleasing, serving, and loving Christ one's primary goal in life. Such allegiance to Christ's lordship flows naturally from a genuine allegiance to the truth about Jesus (faith). If a person genuinely welcomes Jesus' claims to be the one true Lord and Savior, repentance and submission to His lordship logically follow. In this regard consider 2 Corinthians 5:15:

". . . and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf"

Notice that it is the fact that Jesus "died and rose again" on our behalf that motivates us to allegiance whereby we now "live for Him." When we truly embrace the fact that Jesus died and was resurrected to provide the basis for our salvation, it is only natural to repent of our allegiance to self and to pledge our deepest allegiance to this remarkable Savior.

All legitimate Bible teachers agree that God wants us to repent and yield allegiance to Christ's lordship. But some have been reluctant to view repentance as a condition for salvation, usually for fear that this would lead to works salvation. As I discussed above, this fear is unfounded, relying as it does on an incorrect understanding both of what repentance is and what works salvation is. That repentance is a condition for salvation, and not merely an adjunct requirement to salvation, is seen in verses such as the following:

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26)

"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10)

". . . unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3, 5)

Notice that if one refuses to "deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me [Jesus]," then one will "lose his life" and "forfeit his soul." The only way I see to responsibly interpret this passage is that a willingness to follow Christ (what I have been calling allegiance to Jesus as one's own Lord) is a condition for salvation. Accordingly, in 2 Corinthians 7:10 true repentance is said to lead to salvation, whereas in Luke 13:3, 5 a lack of repentance is said to lead to destruction. These and other verses make it clear that repentance from sin and a willingness to follow Jesus as one's own Lord is a condition for obtaining salvation.

It may be helpful to consider what allegiance to Jesus as Lord is *not*. This allegiance is *not* equal to **obedience** or **character**.

Allegiance is your basic life commitment to follow Christ; it is the underlying, *fundamental motivation* to love and serve Christ with your life.

Obedience, on the other hand, is made up of the *specific choices* that you make in particular circumstances. Sincere obedience flows from an underlying allegiance.

Character is the tendency of response that results from *repeated, past obedience*. Character flows from a pattern of obedience, and therefore takes time to develop.

Somewhat ironically, the best predictor of obedience in a particular instance is probably not allegiance, but character. I am most likely to resist a particular temptation and respond in obedience when I have already developed a habit of obedience in that area (i.e., when I have developed character in that area—a tendency to obey in that area). Though it is true that underlying allegiance to Christ will generally lead to specific acts of obedience to Christ (and this in turn to the development of character), this connection between allegiance and obedience is not always as robust in our experience as we would like, and the development of character (through obedience) does not occur at the same time and the same rate in all areas of my life. In a very real sense, *every sin* that a Christian commits is a violation of his or her allegiance to Christ. For that moment, at least, when I am choosing my selfish sinful desire over God's will for me, I am resisting Christ's claim over my life as Lord. These breaches of allegiance occur most often (but not exclusively) in areas of one's life where character has not been consistently developed. Our flesh is often well-conditioned in these areas by years of sin, and this flesh-conditioning can make it disturbingly easy for us to act in a manner that goes against our basic underlying allegiance to Christ. For these reasons, the most we can usually conclude from our commission of a specific sin is that we have not yet developed character in that particular area, not that we necessarily lack allegiance to Christ more generally. (See the separate essay "[Assurance](#)" for more a more in-depth treatment of what the Bible has to say about the relation between sin and allegiance.)

Thus, just as I may pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States, for example, and yet in a moment of selfishness break some specific law of the same sovereign state, so I may hold a fundamental allegiance to God and yet—by succumbing to the influence of my fleshly desires or the deceiving influence of Satan—still sin against God in some particular instance. When this happens I feel the pain of regret in my heart over what I have done, *precisely because* I have acted contrary to my allegiance. I have failed the One I most want to please. It is that root desire to please my Master that drives me to confession and repentance after I have sinned. If I had no allegiance, I would not feel compelled to repent. This is why John can write that those who "walk in the light" are true Christians (1 John 1:7). In the context of that passage, walking in the light does *not* mean that one perfectly obeys, for only two verses later in 1:9 John encourages us to confess our sins, and in 2:1-2 he assures us that "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." John recognizes that we will sin as Christians. Walking in the light cannot therefore mean the absence of sin, or walking in perfection. Instead, the context suggests that walking in the light means two things:

(a) desiring to obey Him in all things, and

(b) confessing (instead of refusing to recognize) our sins when we do fail to obey Him.

This is just what I mean by the term *allegiance*. Allegiance to Christ's lordship is the fundamental desire to please and obey God, often expressed most poignantly by my brokenness when I do fail to obey Him. The one who has no allegiance will generally not feel this same kind of brokenness, because he is not particularly concerned with his failure to please God.

VI. Summary and Implications

We can summarize the biblical conditions for salvation, then, as follows. God accepts me and allows me to enter into a relationship with Him when:

I believe that Jesus is God's unique Son, the Christ sent to bring salvation to the world on the basis of His death and resurrection—indeed the Lord God Himself in human form;

I express my allegiance to these truths by depending on Jesus alone as the sole agent of my salvation, and not even in part on any merit from my own good works;

I switch my fundamental loyalty away from myself, my needs, my sinful desires, or any other person or thing, and instead commit myself to the Lord Jesus, to serve, honor, love, and please Him the rest of my life.

Given such an explicit set of requirements for salvation (to which we were driven by the Scriptures surveyed earlier), one may be left wondering "Whatever happened to simple, childlike faith?" Indeed, is it even possible for a young child to fulfill the conditions for salvation listed above? (I thank my friend John Stroud for raising these questions in response to an earlier draft of this essay.)

Let me make several observations. First, we must be careful about evaluating the conditions for salvation by whether a child could fulfill them. The above conditions apply only to those who have passed the age of accountability (which will differ from person to person), because God does not impute guilt to children before they have developed a certain maturity of moral awareness (see my essay "[Thoughts on Original Sin](#)"). Consequently, there is no logical necessity that the conditions for salvation outlined above apply to younger children.

Having said this, it seems to me that the essence of the above conditions for salvation is of such a nature that it could in fact be grasped by many if not most school-aged children. That essence is **loyalty to Christ**. Children generally understand the concept of loyalty because they naturally have a loyalty to their parents, as well as to other important persons or objects in their lives. Granted, children often violate these loyalties, especially as they grow older and increasingly test out their independence. Yet, I think it is not too controversial that most children understand the concept of loyalty (and the closely associated concept of faith) and are capable of exercising it. Many children, then, who are taught of Jesus from Scripture and have at least an implicit understanding of loyalty can be expected to be capable of yielding a genuine allegiance to Christ that encompasses the essence of the above conditions (though the child may not be able to articulate those conditions).

Second, it is unlikely that the conditions for salvation were preached by the apostolic church in a form as focused as that presented above. These conditions have been gleaned from various passages throughout Scripture that touch on the subject; there is no single passage that provides a comprehensive discussion. Consequently, it is likely pushing the Scripture too far to say that each person who yields loyalty to Christ must have an equally clear understanding of each of the various conditions of salvation. As I noted in the related essay "[Assurance](#)," the thief on the cross, for example, probably had an incomplete understanding of Christ's identity (e.g., he knew nothing of Christ's impending resurrection), and yet Jesus assured him that they would be together in paradise. Similarly, it seems reasonable that a person (including a child) can yield allegiance to Christ at a fundamental level, and yet there remain room for much growth in that person's understanding of who Christ is and what are the implications of such loyalty to Christ. It is important to keep in mind in this regard that God does not dispense salvation in the way that an automatic teller machine dispenses bills. The conditions for salvation must be understood in the context of a developing *relationship* between the sinner and his Maker. God knows the heart of the budding believer, and He graciously cooperates in the process by which one's loyalty to Christ is first engendered and then develops to a more complete form.

On a separate note, there is one other point that I want to clarify before concluding this essay. In speaking above of the "conditions" for salvation, I have intended to refer to those aspects of our response to God that must be present in us in some sense *prior to* God granting us salvation. Without the allegiance of faith and repentance on our part, as outlined above, God will not grant us salvation. There are, however, "conditions" on salvation in another sense which I have not dealt with in this essay; namely, conditions that *follow from* (rather than precede) salvation and provide external evidence that salvation has genuinely been experienced. For example, the Bible teaches that the life of any genuine believer will exhibit love, the practice of righteousness, and a willing confession of Jesus (see the first epistle of John, which was written to address just this issue). These characteristics can be called "conditions" on salvation in an evidential sense only, because they derive from the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

What, then, are the practical implications of the above survey? As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, a proper understanding of the biblical conditions for salvation has important implications in several areas of the Christian life. For example, a clear biblical perspective may help those who struggle to gain assurance of their salvation by distinguishing legitimate from spurious requirements for salvation. In the separate essay "[Assurance](#)" I address a number of issues in this area.

There is one other area of concern, however, that I want to briefly address here by way of conclusion. Throughout the history of the Church, and up until this day, there have been segments within the Church who have added conditions to salvation other than those listed above, and in so doing have gone beyond what is stated in the scriptures. Sometimes this has been done explicitly, as when a church or denomination has insisted that to be a true believer one must be a member of that particular church or denomination. Sometimes it has been broader or more implicit, as when some conservative evangelicals have implied (even if they didn't outright say it) that only other conservative evangelicals, or only those who hold to doctrines such as the inerrancy of Scripture, are genuinely saved.

Please do not misunderstand me: I consider myself to be among the most conservative of evangelicals. I am not saying that issues such as inerrancy which characterize the evangelical movement are unimportant--I believe them to be of vital importance. But as important as they are, nowhere does the Bible say that one must hold to a particular viewpoint of this sort in order to be a genuine Christian. Whoever by faith embraces and trusts Jesus as Savior, Lord, and God the Son, and genuinely yields allegiance to His lordship, that person is my brother or sister in Christ, regardless the other differences there may be between us.

Of course, these other differences may at times keep us from being able to minister effectively together or worship unhindered together. This is one of the reasons churches have creeds and doctrinal statements, which inevitably cover much more doctrinal ground than the essential conditions of salvation listed above. The formulation and enforcement of such statements is at times necessary and serves a useful function. But we must never mistake our full doctrinal statements for entrance requirements to the kingdom of heaven. God has been very clear about what is required to enter the kingdom; namely, allegiance to Jesus, as I have outlined above.

Jesus expressed His view on this matter in two episodes, one recorded in Mark 9:40 and Luke 9:50, and the other recorded in Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23. In the first episode, a concerned John informs Jesus that the disciples had seen a man successfully casting out demons in Jesus' name, and had tried to hinder him because the man was not a member of Jesus' inner circle of disciples. Jesus corrected John, saying:

"Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:39-40)

John's concern is similar to the concern of many moderns who raise suspicious eyebrows at other professing Christians outside their own church, denomination, or particular tradition. In this passage, Jesus seems to be saying that as long as those outside your group hold to a proper confession of Jesus (in line with the essential conditions for salvation outlined earlier), as long as they appear to be working for Jesus (in this case by performing miracles in Jesus's name), and as long as they are not clearly opposed to Jesus (by not "speaking evil of" Jesus), then we should assume them to be friends, not foes.

The second episode involved Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees, in which they accused Him of operating in league with Beelzebul. In His response to them, Jesus made the statement:

"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters." (Luke 11:23)

At first glance this statement may appear to contradict Jesus' earlier statement in Mark 9:40 and Luke 9:50. However, this is not the case. In the earlier episode, Jesus adopted an assumption of camaraderie because the man who had been casting out demons offered every indication of genuinely acting in Jesus' name. In the second episode, however, the Pharisees had openly blasphemed Jesus. This was, in fact, the red flag that Jesus had warned John to look for in Mark 9:39, for the Pharisees were quick to "speak evil of [Jesus]." In such a situation, the principle Jesus presented in the first episode does not apply; instead, the principle in Luke 11:23 above is operative. We should assume that anyone who "speaks evil of Jesus" as the Pharisees did is against Him (see also 1 John 2:23; 4:2-3), even if such a person is purportedly religious and claims to be defending the honor of God (as the Pharisees claimed about themselves).

Thus, Jesus taught us to give professing believers (i.e., those who claim to fulfill the conditions for salvation outlined earlier) the benefit of the doubt (see also 1 John 4:15), unless there is clear evidence that contradicts that profession (i.e., they "speak evil of Jesus"). Of course, there are ways other than just "speaking evil of Jesus" to contradict a profession of faith. For example, it contradicts genuine faith if one exhibits a pattern of hatred (1 John 3:15) or exhibits a fundamental allegiance to sin rather than to Christ (1 John 3:8). But when someone exhibits a genuine allegiance both to the truth about Jesus and to Jesus as Lord, then we should in Christ's love accept that person as a brother or sister in Christ, regardless the person's denominational persuasion or the particular secondary doctrines to which the person subscribes.

