

Statement of faith vs. Statement of how to have faith

While most churches and denominations have a Statement of Faith or Belief, caution should be used to not replace faith in Jesus with the simple acceptance of basic theology outlined in these statements. Faith and assurance in basic theology are not the same as faith to follow Jesus, and one's faith would end up as an extension of, *"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?"* (James 2:19-20) or the fulfillment of, *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand"* (Matthew 7:26-27). Following Jesus, rather than simply agreeing with theology, is the only true expression of saving faith.

The Object of Our Faith

"Faith comes through hearing, and hearing of the words of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Jesus' teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments, spoken to us while He was on earth, have preeminence in Scripture for a living, practical, and saving faith.

Jesus, Himself, is the Living Word of God, and He, rather than the written word, is our object of belief and faith. The written word in turn, and completely inspired by the Holy Spirit, is given to show us how to express and live out belief and faith in Jesus. "Believing in the Bible" or believing what Jesus specifically said for having temporal and eternal life will produce two different "Christians."

Jesus told us that all scripture before Him was written about Him, and that others would supplement His words after He departed. These other teachings provide us with examples and specifics of a living faith, expound on heavenly mysteries, highlight the hopes of Old Testament events, provide specifications to Jesus' life-death-life, and highlight the need for preparation and hope of future events. They are not, however, in themselves objects of "faith in knowledge" or "faith in doctrine" and do not preempt, negate, replace, or modify the need to pursue a corporal and eternal life based on belief in Jesus and His teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments.

Saving faith

As such, faith to save is in Jesus rather than the acceptance of, or agreement with, doctrine or theologies. Saving faith does not only result from our response to Him to be "born again," but from response to any of His callings for us to repent and/or to follow Him. This is shown by Jesus' many and varied interactions with people who responded by faith. It is possible, however, to "accept" or "claim" the doctrine of propitiation of sins, call it salvation, but totally circumvent repentance of an old life and pursuit of a new life in following Jesus. A simple earthly example would be an owner's manual to life. Repentance and following Jesus are always the quick start steps to start or continue a life of saving faith with all its peace, purpose, and power. In contrast, various doctrines such as the propitiation for sin, God's grace vs. His law, or original sin vs. our

own sin are specifications of what happens from steps of faith in Jesus, Himself, and are not, in themselves, objects of faith. In the owner's manual for life, it has become very common to enthusiastically agree with a spec without starting or continuing anything from the operating portion of the manual. This is equivalent to the parable of the Sower's seed falling on rocky places (it produces no firm root) or in the thorns (it is choked by worries and pleasures of this world).

Saving faith must be a life-changing faith. Our former life in the flesh is continually displaced with our new life in the Spirit. We still have the flesh with all its wants, needs, lusts, and corruption but we are now children of God who constantly thirst to become like His Son and to be found as imitating Him. As such, *our will* changes to follow *His will* with the faith and circumstances that God has given us. Jesus calls us to be perfect as His heavenly Father is perfect. Since only Jesus is perfect, we pursue perfection by always pursuing His perfect teachings, commandments, warnings, and judgments, even in our imperfect way. His forgiveness and blood cleanse us, His loving discipline sanctifies us, and His grace keeps us and supports us through it all.

We are not "born again" by *our* works of God's Law, but by His will, forgiveness, and grace. We are, however, born again spiritually in order to work the works of Jesus, and progressively more as we grow up spiritually in Him. His Holy Spirit works through us, depending on our willingness, quenching, or grieving of Him. Failure to ever follow the works that He has for us is an indication of never having been born again. Temporary failures to follow those works must be continually assessed by us and can be repented of and forgiven by His blood, mercy, and grace.

Warnings and Assurances

Jesus' teachings and commandments are interlaced with warnings and judgments for disregarding them. Our goal is to follow Jesus in love, but the warnings are for when our flesh cries out for lust, desire, or even self-preservation. He warns us this way because His ways are Life and everything outside of His ways promotes death. For instance, He says, "*Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy,*" or "*If you forgive someone their sins, My heavenly Father will forgive your sins* (and vice versa)." These verses are not so much direct commandments as they are statements of spiritual reality. We are willing to follow that reality when we are full of His Spirit and fellowshiping with Him, but not so much when our flesh is tired, sick of it, and screaming to do something else. For example, Jesus', Himself, did not desire to bear the sins of the world and go through a torturous death on a cross, but He was willing to obey and follow His Father. In our small way, no one's flesh wants to bear a cross for Jesus, but our spirits can be willing as we learn the contrasts of suffering from the flesh or suffering in the Spirit. Thus, Jesus' warnings and judgments are a tangible stepping-stone of spiritual reality and fear of God with the power to quickly bring us back onto Jesus' Path of Peace and eternal plan.

There are many assurances in the New Testament for the hope of salvation for the believer, but each has the condition of somehow being "in Christ" rather than "having accepted" appropriate

doctrines. Scripture frequently tells us to look for and evaluate ourselves by these “practical” assurances. At issue, however, is the never-ending ability to separate a metaphorical assurance from a practical one, thus leading to much teaching that all “believers” are “safe and secure,” regardless of how they live out those beliefs.

For instance, we are wonderfully assured that, *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1), yet the condition of being “in Christ Jesus” is detailed in the rest of the chapter 8 and the entire letter, and is summarized by, *“for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (Romans 8:13). Jesus, likewise, provides great detail about what those flesh and Spirit differences are in His Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, it is very possible for a person to think that they are “in Christ Jesus” simply because they said a sinner’s prayer at some point in their life, rather than because they are willing to be in, and are pursuing, Christ Jesus’ life.

Metaphorical assurances that replace practical assurances of scripture are abundant in modern church teachings. Examination of scripture surrounding any list of “God’s promises to believers” will easily show the conditions that are expected of believers to partake in those promises. Another example is that most believers have the assurance that they are heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ, and will be glorified with Christ; but how many have heard, let alone truly believe, the condition, *“if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him”* (Romans 8:17b)? In addition, John’s first letter has the wonderful assurances that, *“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all,” “if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin,”* and *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:5,7,9). Yet how many are aware that these warm promises are punctuated with cold warnings for introspection against the possibility for different ways and outcomes? These punctuations are: *“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth,” “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us,”* and *“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us”* (1 John 1:6,8,10).

For decades (if not centuries), many people have expressed doubts about their salvation, implying that their sins are too much for God to forgive. It is likely these doubts are not based on God’s ability to forgive, but that something is missing from their “born-again” lives. Every person’s heart, soul, mind, and body were created to work, fellowship, and worship God through following His Son, yet most are taught that “works” negate the cross and that “fellowship” is only found in worship. In this way, worship quickly becomes routine and empty. In contrast, each believer was made to be a type of priest to their families, friends, associates, and neighbors, and to lay down their lives by testifying of Jesus in both His words and deeds of love and mercy. In a fallen and dark world, His good works living through us and our fellowship with Jesus while doing them never becomes routine or empty. We gain mental, emotional, social, and physical healing (rest) in Him by being yoked to Him in His work, not by riding in a

cart that He's imagined to be pulling. Following His commandments bring peace, purpose, and power to the Christian life and assurance of current and eternal fellowship with one's Savior.

A Statement of Liability

A million times over, I recommend discarding this and any other statement of faith and building one's life on what the only Author and Perfector of faith (Jesus) said to do, to think, and to be. Each person is different, and Jesus is the only One Who can disciple us each day under each circumstance. This current statement is not theology or doctrine; it's only a personal testimony of what I have seen, heard, and experienced in my own life. The only way He's given to have the perfect temporal and eternal life He has for us is to personally learn from Jesus, day by day, as we are yoked to Him. At His judgment, everyone will either have or not have their own personal testimony of Jesus living through them.

Examples of scripture (NASB) for "The Object of Our Faith"

"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'" (Matthew 17:5)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:1-3)

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24)

"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand" (Matthew 7:26)

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35)

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26)

"Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled'" (Luke 24:44)

"He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:24)

"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46)

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10)

Examples of scripture (NASB) for "Saving Faith"

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)

"Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13)

"The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14)

"we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1b)

"And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother'" (Matthew 12:49-50)

"Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8)

"The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10)

"For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush" (Luke 6:44)

"Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you" (2 Peter 1:10-11)

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph 2:10)

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8)

Examples of scripture (NASB) for "Warnings and Assurances"

"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19-20)

"Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:33-35)

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

"Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.' For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:28-30)

"And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it'" (Mark 8:34-35)

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15)

"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21)

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:8)

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10)

"By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:3-6)

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS" (Matthew 11:29)

Examples of scripture (NASB) for "A Statement of Liability"

"And He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?'" (Luke 10:26)

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:1-4)

"When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29)

"Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'" (Revelation 19:10)

"For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one will bear his own load" (Galatians 6:3-5)

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.' And He was saying to them, 'Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides'" (Mark 4:23-24)