The Conditional "IF"

Continued study and reevaluation is in order lest we follow the tracks of other wanderers. All sincere searchers through the ages have found puzzling and unanswered questions in their quest to find a consistent theology. With no intention of irreverence, I have to say that I perceive no consistent interfacing of doctrines taught by the various New Covenant writers. It is I, rather than they, who is at fault, I agree.

My perceived problem stems from the topical treatment of facets of doctrine by the inspired writers. They do not always weave a whole fabric by relating all essential elements, conditions, and stipulations into one essay – such as the sovereignty of God, election, predestination, God's calling, our calling on God, accountability, justification, sanctification, activity of the Holy Spirit, security, vulnerability, grace being irresistible or conditional, faith, obedience of faith, kinds of law, definitions of response/works, imperatives, and expedients. This is no exhaustive list.

There is an allurement to that common trap. Like a hunting dog who picks up the scent of one creature, ignores all other scents, and follows the one, it is common for us to choose one Biblical topic, then by help of concordance and dictionary to sniff out every passage that we can relate to this narrowed search. We build up a scriptural case, but it may not interface with the whole body of truth. We can bark up the doctrinal tree with enough dogmatism (a puny pun!) to become exclusive and derisive of others who are barking up different trees. One illustration of this exercise will be used for this essay.

In the last third of this century a focus on the Holy Spirit has been intensified that has developed some proliferating hybrid doctrines. It revives the older concept of the sovereignty of God to the point of denying any initiative of man. In effect, it says that man cannot reach out to God but that the Spirit must first enable man to respond. In accordance with this, the Spirit gives faith and repentance to chosen individuals, thus saving (regenerating) them by that faith, and then the individual responds to the grace already extended to him. The life of the redeemed one is continually led by the Spirit without which he cannot do pleasing works of sanctification. This is deemed to be the life filled, led, and directed by the Holy Spirit. This is sometimes relayed with condescending attitude to those who question such an all-prevailing possession of the Spirit.

In our "rediscovery of grace," the misunderstanding of "not of works" has led some to see faith itself as a gift of God rather than something we accomplish. Yet we have known of no person being *given* faith who did not first hear the gospel which *produced* the faith. The person then acted upon his faith rather than responding to his supposed salvation.

If it is all the choice of God and the work of the Spirit, then ultimate salvation is unconditional, or else the Spirit has not done his work effectively. To evade the force of examples of believers who departed from the faith or fell from grace, it has long been contended that such persons were not truly converted in the first place. But the classic example of Simon who previously practiced magic teaches otherwise (Acts 8). When the Samaritans "..believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip." Simon is presented as

equally sincere as the other converts. After his sin, he was directed to repent and pray for forgiveness rather than to repent and be baptized because of the ineffectiveness of his supposedly insincere previous baptism.

Because man can do no work to add to the atonement does not mean that the effect of the atonement for sins is applied to each human being without condition. Both before and after conversion, there are conditional "IFS." We shall list a few.

John 8:31 - "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, '**If** you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'"

John 15:10 - "**If** you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love…"

Romans 10:9 - ".. **if** you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

2 Timothy 2:11-13 - "**IF** we have died with him, we shall also live with him; **if** we endure, we shall also reign with him; **if** we deny him, he also will deny us; **if** we are faithless, he remains faithful…"

1 John 1:9-10 - "**If** we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **If** we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Matthew 6:14-15 - "For **if** you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but **if** you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Romans 8:13 - ".. for **if** you live according to the flesh you will die, but **if** by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live."

1 John 1:7 - ".. **if** we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

1 Timothy 2:15 - "Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, **if** she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."

These are sufficient examples to rivet the point. If the condition is not met, the result will be reversed. Both the reception of saving grace and the continued sanctification it offers are conditional.

So I have used my concordance to find a list of prooftexts to support my point without harmonizing them with other texts that give assurance. Without delineating further in this essay, we will conclude by observing that we can trust happily and confidently in the promises of God being always aware that we can choose to deny the faith or to live in rebellious impenitence. []