

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 201

Hebrews Q&A, Part 1

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Dr. Heiser answers your questions about the book of Hebrews:

- What does Hebrews 10:14 mean when it says "For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified?" (2:00 time stamp)
- In Hebrews 3:18-19, isn't unbelief equated to being disobedient? (16:50)
- In Hebrews 9:14, what is the meaning of "purify our conscience from dead works?" (23:10)
- What is your opinion on what Hebrews 4:9 means by "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God?" (24:48)
- Do you believe that works done on earth determine a level of reward or responsibility in the kingdom? (27:00)
- How do we reconcile the author of Hebrews' emphasis on belief with the way other writers use the word "justified" in regard to works? (35:00)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 201: Hebrews Q&A, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike! How are you?

MH: Pretty good! Good week. I think we're going to have a good Q&A. I obviously look at these ahead of time, and they're good ones.

TS: Lots of questions. We apologize that we couldn't get to everybody's questions, but we certainly picked most of them. Just know that we did get your questions and we can't answer everybody's questions, but...

MH: Some of them are thesis topics! [laughter]

TS: Yeah, but we've got some good ones for you. Depending upon the length here, we may break it up into two episodes. I guess we'll find out as time goes here, Mike.

MH: Yep. They are good. I had a chance to look at them. Trey sent me a list and then we picked what we thought we could do in an hour. That might be wishful thinking because they're all good questions. A number of them are either kind of involved or I think require some extended discussion and illustration. So that's

why we're talking about this episode already the way we are, in terms of time. But Trey, I guess we can just jump right into it.

TS: Yeah, and we also know once you get going it's hard to... [laughter] It's hard to pull you back, so...

MH: Thanks for that. [laughter]

TS: All right. Let's just get into it. Chad has our first question. His question is:

2:00

Chad was wondering if Mike could expound a little bit on the implications that are projected by Hebrews 10:14. "For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

MH: The emphasis on "a little bit"... well, that's going to fly right out the window! [laughing] Where do I want to jump in here? I think that it's really helpful in something like this... Why don't we just read the actual verse so people kind of get the context for the specifics of the question. Hebrews 10:14 says:

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

So you have this element of something that's already happened, but then you have this ongoing sort of thing. Ultimately, the question revolves around the relationship of what Jesus did and our life—our works, so to speak. How does all of that fit into this? I think we really need to distinguish (not just for the sake of this question, but some of the other questions just generally in the wake of the Hebrews series) the scriptural concept of discipleship (i.e., sanctification) from merit-based thinking. If you're able to do that, trust me—it's going to be a boon to your Christian life. Obviously, scripture talks a lot about discipleship and holy living. It obviously talks about your sanctification being accomplished already. So we have these two things. I think where things get muddled is when we start thinking about works as though they have something to do with merit. This is a one-string banjo for me—you've heard this many times. I have a whole sermon on the internet about it called "While We Were Yet Sinners," where I talk about this. For the sake of our discussion here, we have to be able to distinguish the concept of discipleship from merit-based thinking (earning eternal life). Those are two different things. We need to stop thinking about works in terms of earning God's love and earning God's favor. God loved us while we were yet sinners, before we cared a whit about being a disciple or living holy. What we do behaviorally doesn't spark or stimulate love in the heart of God for us. That's already there. It's been there from the get-go. So I think we need to just sort of get these kinds of things fixed in our heads.

5:00

In the case of Hebrews 10:14, and really any other passage that uses a word like "sanctify" (to make holy), we have to realize that "sanctify" can mean different things, and it really depends on who's doing what. What's really interesting here is that (if you have software or some other means of doing this, you can) if you actually look up the verb that's used here in Hebrews 10:14, we have verb *hagiazō*—"to make holy, to make sacred, to sanctify." It's used 28 times. In the active voice (that means the subject is doing the action), that occurs 11 times. And it occurs 17 times in the passive voice. This is where someone is being sanctified by some external agent. Interestingly enough, in the active voice, the passages that use the active voice for *hagiazō* ("to sanctify"), they never describe believers sanctifying themselves by their works. Never. I'm going to actually take the time to read all of those verses to you. These are the 11 instances where *hagiazō* (this verb in Hebrews 10:14) occurs in the active voice—there are different tenses, but we're looking at the active voice.

¹⁷ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? Matthew 23:17

So there the temple is sanctifying the gold.

³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated [*hagiazō*] and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming...' John 10:36

So the subject there isn't believers.

¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. John 17:17

So he's asking God to sanctify us—his disciples.

²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word... Ephesians 5:26

Who is the "he?" God, Jesus. So God is the active agent.

¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Hebrews 13:12

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. 1 Peter 3:15

Here, believers are told to honor Christ as holy—to sanctify Jesus in their hearts. It doesn't say anything about working—behaving a certain way so that God feels affectionate or feels love for us. Back to the Gospels. I'm just going through a spreadsheet here of the different tenses. These are all active voice.

¹⁹ You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Matthew 23:19

In the Gospel, it's the altar here of the temple that sanctifies.

19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. John 17:19

This is Jesus praying.

¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.

The active one, "he who sanctifies..." That's not believers! We don't sanctify ourselves through our works, it's somebody else playing the active role, and we are the passive recipient.

¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh... Hebrews 9:13

So here he's talking about the blood of bulls and goats sanctifying someone or something. Of course, then he says that it doesn't do that.

So those are all 11 occurrences of *hagiazō* in the active voice. The passages never describe believers sanctifying themselves—making themselves holy, solidifying their standing before God as set apart individuals by their works. It never happens. The passive voice occurs 17 times. This is where believers are sanctified by an external agent. Again, you caught the drift in some of those verses I already read because the passive voice occurs in the same context as an active voice. I'm not going to go through all of those because, again, the passive voice is some external agent or voice (i.e., God or Jesus or the sacrifice of Jesus) that sanctifies us. It's not our job. We don't have a role in it.

This takes us to the question of what makes us sanctified, and what does that mean? We often think of this term as though it is the result of spiritual disciplines, but that isn't the way it's presented in the New Testament. We are set apart (made holy) in the sense (just like the Old Testament) of being made a

possession of God. Think of the temple. You had objects that were sanctified because they were used in sacred space exclusively. You had people who were sanctified—priests—who occupied sacred space. Specifically, God set them aside. This "setting apart" idea... that's the way that we are talked about as believers. We are set apart by God. We are made a possession of God by something God does or something Christ did. Nothing we do (think of the active voice) achieves that status. That's why sanctification is presented the way it is. However, scripture is pretty clear about holy living and discipleship. It's just that other words and descriptions are used for those concepts. We don't achieve the status of being God's children or his possession by our works. We are to live holy *because we are God's possession—because we are God's children*. We are to be holy and live holy *in light of* what God has done—what Christ has done—not to *obtain* it. We are to be pure vessels so as to be of use by our owner, not to convince him to own us! He didn't need convincing. "God loved us while we were yet sinners." Our performance wasn't the issue, and it's not the issue now, in terms of being sanctified.

Now, I realize this runs contrary to the way a lot of this is preached. I can't help that, but like I said, you can run the search for yourself and see how *hagiazō* is used. You're going to find just what I read to you. I don't need to make it up because it's just there. So let's try not to think about it the way these things are preached to us. Let's try to think about what the text actually says. So the text affirms two things: It's God who sanctifies us, but yet we are supposed to live holy. We're supposed to be disciples—followers of Christ. A lot of the questions are sort of tracked along this trajectory, so we're going to be returning to these themes in other questions.

But just keep going here a little bit more with Hebrews 10:14. So if we go back to the verse, I think we should read it in light of verse 10. We've actually got two passages here—two verses to sort of consider and be mindful of. We've got Hebrews 10:14 and Hebrews 10:10. So let me just turn there real quickly. We have here in verse 10 (in this inter-trinitarian conversation, in which the Son comes to do the Father's will):

¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Once for all. It doesn't need to be supplemented. It's not going to run out. It's not going to be obsolescent. We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Then we get down to verse 14:

¹⁴ For by a single offering...

Well, that's the offering back there in verse 10.

...he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

What we have here is we have this statement of something that has occurred. It really even occurred for all time. It has eternal ramifications. And then we have this "being sanctified" kind of language. What we have here is we have by a single offering, Jesus has perfected... he's brought this into being. It's complete. He has completed for all time this status—our status before God. The "being sanctified" idea describes the ongoing result. The result of what Jesus did through this one offering—this once-for-all-time offering—is still in process. It's still effective. It's still good. It didn't run out. The result of it is still in process. To put it another way, Christ's offering set us apart to God, and that set-apartness is still in effect. It's ongoing. It will remain to the end if we keep believing. There are other passages in Hebrews that get into this, and I think this is an important passage. If you want to refer to sort of a theme passage in Hebrews for all the stuff we've been talking about in this series and what we're talking about now, it's Hebrews 3. Here's verses 12-14 (in which he addresses them as brothers):

¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart...

Hmm. He's talking to brothers about the danger of an unbelieving heart. We don't want that to happen.

¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

What's the deceitfulness of sin? It's what he was just worried about: the evil, unbelieving heart.

¹⁴For we have come to share in Christ, *if indeed* we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

15:00 What's really interesting here... We don't have time to mention everything when we do these episodes on book studies, but the phrase "deceitfulness of sin"... The noun there for "sin" has the definite article in front of it. You could make an exegetical point here that this is what Wallace and other grammarians call the "deictic"—the pointing article. It has demonstrative force. In other words, "We don't want any of you to be hardened by the deceitfulness of *this* sin or *that* sin," referring back to the problem of the evil, unbelieving heart. So you could make an exegetical point to reinforce the idea that this is what he's concerned about. He's

talking to believers about not falling into unbelief. That's what freaks him out. It's the only thing that will impede the natural progression of us being set apart by what Jesus did. What Jesus did is still in effect. It's going to see us through to the end. We will have eternal life. We will be a member of God's family. We will be part of the household of God if we believe. That's it. It has nothing to do with performance. We don't sanctify ourselves. We're already sanctified, but we just need to keep believing. Again, discipleship is an issue that's covered in a lot of different passages, it just doesn't use this sort of vocabulary. So Hebrews 10:10 and 10:14 have nothing to do with our own effort. Our growth as disciples is the subject of other passages, not this one. In any event, we seek to grow and be holy for many reasons. Earning God's favor—earning the status of being God's child or his possession—is not one of those reasons. Honestly, it seems like we need a whole episode on this, but let's just transition to another question, since we'll kind of pick up with this theme again.

TS: Justin has four really good questions here. The first one is:

16:50

In Hebrews 3:18-19, isn't unbelief equated to being disobedient? Disobedience would have been to the Torah (the only Word they had). So couldn't we say that being disobedient to the parts of Torah we can keep today can be unbelief in the Word?

MH: On the one hand, we just read Hebrews 3 and, yeah, the disobedience (the sin that he's worried about there) is an unbelieving heart. But that is not the same as, "Oh, I could have kept the Feast of Tabernacles today. I could observe that on the calendar. And so that's the same as the sin of unbelief." No, not so much. You can't extrapolate a specific episode that the writer of Hebrews is drawing on... He's really worried about people just giving up the faith, as opposed to, "I know I'm not really going to do the Sabbath. I'm not really going to do this point of Torah." That kind of thing. Deciding to not believe is different than either saying, "Well, I don't really think this pertains today so I'm not going to keep this festival" or some other point of Torah that you might do, either accidentally...

Let's just say you steal something or whatever. You could still believe, but you were weak or you were stubborn or hard-hearted or whatever. Let's just approach it this way: The context refers back to the sin of unbelief. That's kind of obvious. The specific episode makes disobedience noted here (unbelief)... It's illegitimate to say that any disobedience is the same sin of unbelief. How do we know that? Because you can disobey out of rebellion. You can disobey out of self-interest as a believer. Now think about this: If every disobedience was unbelief, then you couldn't have believers sin, because by definition every sin would be evidence that they're not believing! It implodes on itself. Every sin would be an act of disavowing belief in the gospel. Honestly, that's just not coherent. By definition, that would make you an unbeliever. So if every sin is the same as the sin of unbelief, then I guess we don't have any believers in the world

because everybody sins. And John says quite clearly in 1 John 1:10 that if we say we don't sin, we make God a liar. It just isn't coherent. It implodes on itself.

20:00

Let's look at some examples. When Moses disobeyed God (he gets angry and hits the rock), did that make him an unbeliever? Was he now an unbeliever? What didn't he believe? Where did he throw his believing loyalty to? He sinned because he was angry. Maybe he had too much self-confidence. Before when he was called, the problem was he didn't have any confidence. He was faithless. And now maybe he just has a big head. He still believes that Yahweh is the God of gods. That hasn't changed. When people violate Torah, are they treated as Gentiles in the Old Testament? Are they looked at as unbelievers? If they violate anything, like some ritual impurity or some moral impurity, the reason that they're punished is because they're part of the community. They're not all just exiled, or the community doesn't just evaporate. Because *everyone* sins. Every sin is not the same as the sin of unbelief, because then, by definition, you wouldn't have a believing community. At any given point of time, you just wouldn't have it. When David commits adultery, did he stop believing in Yahweh? If you look at David and the whole situation (his prayer), it's obvious that he didn't. He still believed in Yahweh, but he knew he had done terrible things. Since no Old Testament person was sinless, were they all unbelievers? You kind of see where this is going. It's not logically coherent. It's not theologically coherent, either, to make that specific equation.

I would say (and I'm going to say this not because of the question or the questioner, but I'm going to make this broad because I have heard this thing come over the pulpit, so I'm going to shoot at a pulpit in my past), this sort of mindset leaves no room for being human. It disallows human frailty, of which God is quite aware. In other words, it implicitly requires perfection for fellowship with God. Honestly, that's dangerous. That's just dangerous and, I would say, unbiblical—both by precept and by example (the lives of people that you read about in the Old Testament, and the New Testament, for that matter). The kind of extrapolation that we have implied in this approach (this idea)... it's just dangerous. I've just heard this thing in my own past, and so I'm taking a few moments to shoot at it a little bit. It's a way of saying, "Behave a certain way, or maybe you're not saved, or you lose salvation, or your conduct/life/works... you have to do a certain thing or measure up to a certain standard of behavior, or else you're out—you're not a believer." Every sin equated with the sin of unbelief... it's just really, really dangerous. After all, "If you ever sin, then you're just like an unbeliever. That's what you are." Again, I have heard this from the pulpit and it is unscriptural by precept and by example. It's just something that I know is common. I'm not here to beat up on my own context because I still believe that my own original context as a believer had far more benefits than liabilities to me personally. But I just know really good people that were disciples—they wanted to follow the Lord—and this just crushed their spirit. It crushed them. Because as soon as it entered into their minds that, "Anything I do is the same as the sin of unbelief, and I'm just lost and I'm always going to be lost

because I'm always going to sin. I can't be perfect." That is crushing and, honestly, it's a different gospel.

We can go on to another question.

TS: Justin also wants to know:

23:10

In Hebrews 9:14, what is the meaning of "purify our conscience from dead works?"

MH: We touched on this in whatever episode it was when we were in Hebrews 9. It means to stop trusting in dead works that can't save. The contrast to the dead works in the actual passage is seen in the preceding verses ("Christ secured an eternal salvation") and also in the following verse (Hebrews 9:15). I'll read that verse here.

15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

If the first covenant couldn't save you (the first covenant centered on all these rules and rituals and whatever), well the good news is that there's a different covenant in operation now and something was done for you. Christ is the mediator of the new covenant. And a death has occurred. That would be Jesus' death. So that is what you should be trusting. Don't let your conscience be troubled by believing that the first covenant (this system of all these rules and stuff) saves you. So purify your conscience from dead works. Don't get tangled up—don't get enmeshed, don't get spiritually strangled—by all this "work" stuff. It couldn't accomplish salvation in the first place. So now we have something that does accomplish salvation. Christ did something that sets us apart to God (puts us in the family of God), and that's what we need to be believing in. That's what we need to be trusting.

24:48

TS: What is your opinion on what Hebrews 4:9 means by "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God?"

25:00

MH: Whenever we were in Hebrews 4, we spent some time on this, too. But I'm going to go back and read from verse 8:

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God...

What this means is that the rest that Israel obtained under Joshua (i.e., the inheritance of the promised land) was temporary. There remains a different, better rest now for the people of God. If Joshua had given them rest, God wouldn't have talked about another one to come. We are to strive to enter that rest. Does that mean work so hard that God accepts us? No, the second half of verse 11 tells us what it means:

¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

What was the disobedience? We're supposed to strive (Hebrews 4:11) to enter into that rest that remains. Do we have to work so hard that God accepts us? No, the objective is to not fall by the same sort of disobedience. And what was the disobedience that was hearkened to back in chapter 3 and here in chapter 4 again? It was unbelief. The disobedience that kept Israel from their rest was unbelief. That's earlier in chapter 4 again—just go back and look at that. So the striving to enter into the new rest that's offered through Jesus is to believe it and keep believing. Therefore, if we do that, we'll enter into God's rest. By analogy, God stopped working. When he rested, works were over. When we enter into the rest that God has provided for us, works are not an issue. It's been accomplished for us. So we have the analogy of the whole "ceasing from work to enter into rest" idea.

TS: Okay, Justin's last question is:

27:00

Salvation is a gift. Do you believe that works done on earth determine a level of reward or responsibility in the kingdom?

MH: Yeah, I do. I think that works have nothing to do with kingdom residence (salvation), but scripture does suggest rewards in the kingdom are not all the same. Not everybody has the same reward, that kind of thing. I Corinthians 3:10-15, I think, suggests this. I'll just read the passage. Paul says at the beginning of verse 10:

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation [salvation through Christ] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a

reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

30:00 So the works here are not the foundation. The works are what goes on top of the foundation. The works do not replace or displace salvation through Christ. That's very clear in this passage. The works are something put up on top, in addition to this status that was gained for us by what someone else did—namely, Jesus. So the real question here: Is it an all-or-nothing idea? Some people will take this (and I've heard this preached, too)... They wouldn't say it this way, but basically, if you're not nearly perfect (or at least as perfect as the preacher is), if you don't have a life of this endless string of spiritual victories, then you're going to get to heaven, and if you don't have more spiritual victories than not, then everything's going to burn up in flames before your eyes and you'll be with the Lord empty-handed. I think that's bunk. It's not an all-or-nothing idea. It's very doubtful. I doubt that it's a total loss, because what that implies is that on the other side you have a total success. There are no total successes in discipleship. Why? Because we're people. We're humans. We're fallible. We aren't deities. We're not God. By definition, we are imperfect. So if you're going to say that having spiritual failures and struggles with sin... Sometimes you lose. You might even lose a lot. It might be a *huge* struggle. To say that wipes everything out... I just don't see the coherence of that, because then you're taking an imperfect scorecard... Let's say you have more victories than failures. Your scorecard is still imperfect, so God gives you everything? It's a total success? If the scale is tipped the other way, it's a total loss? I don't think that's the picture at all.

What I think is going on here... I should just go to a quick reference in 1 Corinthians 4:5.

⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

I think this verse needs to be part of the preceding chapter, at least considered in tandem with 1 Corinthians 3. I think the point is that everyone is going to suffer some loss and everyone is going to get some reward, but the tallies, as it were (what that amounts to)... I don't see any evidence in scripture where it's equal for everybody. I think we're all just going to see how we could have been used, where we fell short, where we rebelled, where we stumbled, where we just failed. And we'll see what might have been—what God could have done with us in a given circumstance—and we'll suffer loss. But we'll also see what God was able to accomplish with us when we presented ourselves as a useful tool. That's one of the motivations for holy living—to be useful. It has nothing to do with earning a place in God's family—meriting it enough. It has everything to do, though, with

being useful. God wants to use people—he wants to use believers—to help other people become believers grow, to do things for the kingdom. You have to make yourself useful, and basically, if you're just not a disciple of Jesus and you're not trying to live with him as your model, you're going to become pretty darn-well useless, at least useless in certain contexts.

That's really where the rubber meets the road as far as the debate: do we have Christians that are, like, 1% useful and 99% useless? Again, ultimately... I don't know. The Spirit of God takes up residence in someone and encourages or prompts them to do certain things. Do they believe or not believe? Ultimately, I don't have the answer for that. Only the person knows that, and only God knows that at the end of the day. All I know is that we have to believe to have eternal life, and we need to be grateful. We should want to be useful. We need to be grateful for our salvation and live accordingly. Those are the clear things that are taught in scripture. How we take that information and look at somebody else and wonder... well, that's a human thing to do. I understand that. But ultimately, we can't use those ideas to determine for someone else what's really going on there. So I think we need to... We all know people like that. We need to talk to them and be honest with them about their sin. We need to challenge them to think about what's really going on inside. Are you really believing the gospel or not? I don't really care that you prayed a prayer ten years ago and now you've basically taken that and said, "Well, I said the incantation, I can do whatever I want now." I question that. I question the validity of your faith, because you've given me no choice. I wonder because you've given me reason to wonder, but I can't decide for you. I can't tell, I don't know. But you need to examine yourself. Isn't that a scriptural phrase—"Let a man examine himself?" I'm not going to examine you. I'm going to tell you that from what I see, it prompts a concern, but that's about all I can do. I can just tell you I'm concerned. I can't produce that answer for you. Only you can do that.

So we need to encourage people to examine themselves. That's what the New Testament does in any number of places. And I think we ought to stick to that and not try to position ourselves as some sort of wise spiritual authority able to see behind the veil and penetrate a person's mind and really know what's going on in there, but we can get the person (hopefully) to consider themselves and then talk to them about the gospel. The answer is always the same, whether they're a believer and now they're just stuck in sin, or whether they didn't believe at all. The answer is still the same. "Do you believe this right now? Do you believe the gospel *right now*?" I don't need a scorecard, I don't need a box score. I don't need to be omniscient. It doesn't matter. What matters is right now. You need to make this right. You need to make this decision, whatever.

But let's go on to another question. I don't want to be too sermonic here.

TS: All right, Jim from Mississippi, and actually others like Stephen, have asked about Matthew 7. I'm going to read Jim's question:

35:00

Throughout the series, Mike has frequently identified the passages where the writer of Hebrews stresses the importance of belief in Jesus, yet it seems the folks to whom Jesus refers in Matthew 7:21-23 thought that they believed in Jesus, yet he says he never knew them and he cast them out because they did not do the will of his Father. In my own attempt to reconcile these passages, I find that the same word "justified" appears in James 2:24, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." And Romans 3:28, "But they are justified freely by his Christ through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." So maybe the folks in Matthew 7:21-23 either did not believe or they didn't believe the right stuff. I think I'm in the red zone. Can Mike help me put this across the goal line?

I hope he only said that because you won Fantasy. I don't know. But I love the football references.

MH: Yeah, it's a nice turn of phrase there. I think the key here is verse 23 of Matthew 7. In verse 23, Jesus calls these people "workers of lawlessness." I would say that Jesus is targeting pretenders here. They had a profession of allegiance to him: "Lord, Lord!" But their lives showed they did not really believe. They were workers of lawlessness. If that isn't the way to take that passage, then we'd have to affirm that Jesus called genuine believers "workers of lawlessness." I think that's a stretch, to say the least.

Another way of looking at this is to ask, who is Jesus exposing? Who is he targeting here? Is he targeting disciples or believers whose behavior was imperfect? Is he targeting disciples or believers who struggle with sin? Is he targeting disciples or believers who have times of weakness? Well, guess what? All three of those things describe the 11 disciples who weren't Judas! They all got scared, they all forsook Christ, they bickered with each other, they debated their own self-importance... Would Jesus really call those guys "workers of lawlessness?" I don't think so. I think he's targeting pretenders. Where do we get the idea... Honestly, sometimes we sort of subconsciously have this idea that the apostles and Paul were perfect. This becomes part of this works-problem, this discussion. They faltered. The disciples forsook Jesus. I mean, how bad can it get? They struggled with sin. Paul—Romans 7. People love to try to argue Paul out of that passage—that he wasn't really a believer struggling with sin. Frankly, I think they do that because they somehow assume that Paul was some kind of paeon of perfection. Again, Paul is human. He's as human as anybody else. Now, he might sin less, but his sin will probably bother him *more*. You can look at things like that. But he's struggling! There's no reason to think that he didn't struggle. He's not glorified, he's Paul—he's a human being! Again, that list: struggling with sin, behavior's not perfect, they chicken out, they're weak... Those are the 11 disciples. So I don't think Jesus would look at those 11 and guys and say, "You guys are workers of lawlessness." I just don't believe that. So I think what Jesus is targeting is pretenders. And we have to remember that "if we say

we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us." Everyone is going to sin. Everyone's going to struggle. Everyone's going to fail. So if Jesus is shooting at all those people who struggle and fail, then I guess he doesn't have any disciples then. I guess nobody's a believer. Again, you have to think about the ramifications of where these different conclusions lead. Everyone fails. Who would Jesus have as a disciple? I don't think he's targeting believers who are struggling here or who fail. I think he's targeting pretenders. They're not really believers. They might think they are, but they're not.

Now, that takes us to James and this whole faith/works "show me a man's works and then I'll consider his faith real" and all this kind of talk that James uses. James 2:24 was quoted in the question:

²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

40:00

Well, what James means by that I don't think is terribly complicated. I think it gets complicated because we have been brow-beaten into a merit mentality. We think we have to merit God's love. If we believe that—if we swallow that pill—then we create these conundra. Works, according to James, justify faith. What that means is they *validate* faith. Works don't replace faith in anything James says—ever. He doesn't replace faith with works. Works show faith is real. Works serve to point to genuine faith. Faith is the thing that we need to find out if it's real. Real faith is shown by works. Again, the problem is thinking of works like they can be interchanged with faith, or that they replace faith. Works are not a substitute for faith in the book of James. He never says that.

I like to marry Ephesians 2:8 to James. "For by grace you are saved through... faith... without works is dead." Smash the verses together. To me, it's helpful anyway. Maybe it's not helpful at all, but if you think about that: "For by grace you are saved through... faith... without works is dead," the absence of works doesn't say, "Oh, crud. I just didn't work hard enough to merit eternal life." No, the absence of works says, "Faith isn't here." Works are not a substitute for faith. Faith cannot be exchanged for works. Works show that faith is in the building.

This isn't a syllogism, but to try to illustrate this... I've been thinking a lot about this. Let's try to illustrate it this way: let's try to swap in some other terms. So let's start with "works" and "faith." So works (or actions, maybe, if that helps you)... Works don't produce faith. Works don't replace faith. Works validate or demonstrate faith. In other words, works show us that faith is there. Works are necessary to show that faith is real. Their absence invalidates a claim of faith. Now, he's really talking about basically a total absence here. Remember, James says, "Faith without works is dead." He doesn't say, "Faith with 60% works is dead." He says, "Faith without works is dead." So he's really talking about the situation where there's really a total absence. But we have to fix in our minds that

works don't produce faith. They don't replace faith; they validate or demonstrate faith.

Let's use some other vocabulary and see if this doesn't help. Maybe it will, maybe it won't. I have three sets of these. Let's use the phrase "kind gestures" and "love." Kind gestures don't produce love. Just think about the truth of these statements. Kind gestures don't produce love. Kind gestures don't replace love. But kind gestures validate love. In other words, kind gestures are necessary to show that love is real. Their absence would invalidate a claim of love, wouldn't they?

Let's try "obedience" and "loyalty." Obedience doesn't produce loyalty. Obedience doesn't replace loyalty. But obedience validates loyalty. In other words, obedience is necessary to show that loyalty is real. Its absence would invalidate any claim of loyalty.

To be a little more philosophical here, let's try "effects" and "causes." Effects don't produce causes. Effects don't replace causes. Effects validate causes, though. In other words, effects necessarily require a cause. If there's no effect, there's no need to look for a cause.

Now, I don't know if any of that helps, but I think if we start substituting other words... Because we have this works and faith thing that creates a lot of confusion. My advice is always to people to focus on merit and discipleship. As soon as you start using the word "merit," it sort of cleans out the room a little bit. In some cases, a lot. When someone is talking about works being... "That's got to be part of salvation!" So what you're really saying is that we merit eternal life in some way. Anybody who really understands the gospel is going to be caught short by that and go, "Well, boy, I sure don't want to say it that way because then it sounds like God owes us something." Yeah, you're right—it does. But that's actually where you're at theologically if your behavior is a necessary ingredient to salvation itself. Then that's merit. That's merit. That's what that is. There is no merit before God. God doesn't want it, he doesn't expect it, and he doesn't need it. And he knows he ain't gettin' it! [laughs] He's just not! That's why we have Jesus. That's why Jesus is the one who sets us apart and sanctifies us and so on and so forth. So I think merit can clear the room in a lot of ways.

45:00

When we talk about sanctification... Let's use the word "discipleship." Hopefully we know enough about discipleship where we realize that it involves imitating Jesus. It doesn't have anything to do with merit, but it has everything to do with trying to mimic the experience—the life—of Jesus, as a follower of him. Not trying to earn salvation, but just trying to follow him and trying to imitate his life. The real question, again (I've said this before), is "why should we live a holy life?" Shall we sin so that grace may abound? "I want all the grace God has to give me, so I'm going to keep on sinning to experience that grace!" This is a New Testament problem. Paul says in Romans 6:2:

²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

"Died to sin" is Paul's expression for "chose to follow Christ." How can we, who have chosen to follow Christ instead of living for our own passions, think this? And when we believed, when we chose Christ, we were united to his body. You know, the body that died and the one that rose again? So the Christian life is the process of mimicking Jesus—dying to yourself, not putting yourself above showing gratitude to God as a son or daughter in his household. And, of course, treating your neighbor as yourself. That's what Jesus did. Being conformed to his image now that you believe—that's discipleship. That's what we're supposed to be doing. We're supposed to be dying with Jesus—preferring others over ourselves and living according to what God wants us to do. We need to try to imitate that, not to earn the status of sonship or daughtership.

Jesus was already God's Son and he's doing this. He learns obedience by weakness, and all this stuff in Hebrews that we've talked about. We need to imitate that, not so that we merit God's love. God loved us before this was even an issue. He loved us before he even sent Jesus. Our behavior isn't what sparks a feeling of love in God's heart for us. That's already there! But in terms of discipleship, we try to imitate Jesus. We die to our self, we prefer others over our self, we prefer what God wants us to do over our own desires. This is what we try to do. And you know what? If we do that, it's going to produce suffering. There's going to be a consequence to it, just like there was for Jesus. Now, in his case, he became obedient unto death. But guess what? He rose, so we should walk... Because we're united to his resurrection body, too. We're not just united to the one that's going to die; we're united to the one that rose. So we should live, we should walk, as though we're raised from the dead. Meaning, we're free from the dominion of the curse of sin. We're freed from the penalty of sin. The point is imitation, not trying to merit God's love. He already loved you while you were yet a sinner—before you had any thought about any of this. Your behavior doesn't spark that inside God—it's been there the whole time. So discipleship is to be like Jesus, not so that God will say to himself, "Gosh, he or she is so good, I want them up here with me!" No, be like Jesus because he did what was necessary to have you up there with him. You serve out of a grateful heart. If you do, God will reward that by using you—like he'd *love* to use you—to further his own purposes.

So discipleship is about experiencing in your own body what it was like to be Jesus. That includes suffering and struggle. It doesn't mean doing whatever the heck you want, knowing that God loves you anyway. We are to imitate Jesus'

love for the Father, which was reflected by the way he lived. And then take the consequences, just like Jesus did, knowing that a more abundant life is waiting for you on the other side. Jesus knew that. No doubt Jesus enjoyed being human, but it came with a huge cost. His life was never about pleasing himself. Rather, just like Paul says in Philippians, "He took upon the form of a servant and he humbled himself, becoming obedient, even to the point of death." And so discipleship—this thing we call "sanctification"—isn't filling out checklists and isn't doing things so that God looks at us and says, "Gosh, they're good! I want them up here! They've earned it!" No, discipleship is about experiencing in your own body what it was like to be Jesus. We live for God, we live for others. It's servanthood. There's any number of ways you can express it. There are lots of reasons (these are the big ones) to live a certain way, but meriting favor with God and trying to spark some love inside God for yourself is not one of those reasons. It just isn't.

TS: All right, well, we're going to stop it right there and save the rest of the questions for Part 2. But can I just say what great questions we get from such a great audience? They're very thoughtful.

MH: Yeah. These are not lightweight questions.

TS: Absolutely not. And to be able to articulate it in such a concise, articulated manner is hard to do. Usually these questions are... I know you guys. You all send me in your questions and they're a couple of paragraphs long. I do include everything for Mike so he understands the context of your question, but then I kind of condense it down to ask the actual question for the sake of the podcast. But nonetheless, please know that he does see the entire context of your questions. It's hard to ask some of these questions because there's a lot to it!

MH: Yeah, they have to be unpacked, for sure. Like I said, they're not lightweight questions.

TS: Absolutely. All right, Mike. We appreciate everybody sending in their questions. We appreciate Mike answering those questions. Next week, we'll have Part 2. And with that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.