

Press on to Maturity

by
Neil Snyder

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About the Author

Neil Snyder earned a Ph.D. degree in strategic management from the University of Georgia in 1979, and he taught leadership and strategy at the University of Virginia for 25 years.

Dr. Snyder retired from UVA in 2004 and is currently the Ralph A. Beeton Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia.

In 2009, he created a blog called *SnyderTalk* that focuses on Israel and the Middle East. It has a large and growing worldwide readership. The URL for *SnyderTalk* is www.snydertalk.com.

He is the author of many books including *His Name is Yahweh*, *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition*, *Must Jewish People Convert to Christianity to be Saved?*, *What Will You Do with the Rest of Your Life?*, *Stand!*, *Falsely Accused*, *Vision, Values & Courage*, and *The Will to Lead*.

During his tenure at UVA, he served as Policy Advisor for Regulatory Reform to Governor Charles S. Robb of Virginia (1982-1985), and he was co-chairman in 1985 and chairman in 1986 of Governor's Conferences on Small Business in Virginia. In 1985, he received the Small Business

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Advocacy Award from the Virginia Chamber of Commerce.

He served as deacon at Milledge Avenue Baptist Church in Athens, Georgia while working on his doctorate and at Crozet Baptist Church in Crozet, Virginia while teaching at the University of Virginia.

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“For ground that drinks the rain which falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from Elohim; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.” (Hebrews 6: 7-8)

Yahweh wants us to open our hearts to Him and allow Him to lead us where He wants us to go. Salvation is not something to be taken lightly. It’s a life changing experience.

Connecting salvation with being led by Yahweh is not my idea. Keep reading.

In a conversation with Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader and a man who was very knowledgeable about the Scriptures, Y’shua explained salvation this way:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of Elohim.”
(John 3: 3)

In John 3: 16, Y’shua talked about salvation again:

“For Elohim so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

When a person is “born again” he has a new life in the Messiah — an eternal life. It doesn’t begin in the sweet by and by. Eternal life starts the instant we put our faith in Yahweh — when we believe in Him. In the truest sense, Salvation Day is our birthday. It’s the commencement of our new life with Yahweh.

Salvation is the Beginning, not the End

In one sense, salvation is like an M.D. degree or any other professional degree. Those degrees are required for entrance into a profession the same way that salvation is required for admission to heaven. They are tickets to the game. They are NOT the game itself.

When you are saved, the game begins. You take your position on the field, and the Coach takes charge. Paul explained it like this:

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of Elohim, these are sons of Elohim.” (Romans 8: 14)

In John 3: 36, Y’shua explained it a little differently:

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of Elohim abides on Him.”

The kind of obedience that the Messiah and Paul were talking about is not limited to adherence to the Ten Commandments and all the other laws in the Bible. The obedience they were discussing has to do with being led by Yahweh. That doesn't minimize the importance of Yahweh's written word, but it does raise the leading of Yahweh's Spirit to the appropriate level.

Evidence of our new birth will become apparent in due course. The changes in our lives may be slow and difficult to see, or they may be dramatic and easy to see. Whatever the case may be, Yahweh knows and that's what matters.

Yahweh's Laws are the Rules of the Game

Consider this analogy. Think about the laws in the Bible as the rules of the game — a game like football for instance. To avoid penalties, Yahweh wants us to play by the rules, but winning the game requires scoring points. Sometimes, the most penalized team wins. In fact, that happens a lot.

I'm not saying that penalties are irrelevant because they can prevent us from achieving victory, but when the clock ticks down to zero, the winning team will be the one with the most points. There is no place on the scoreboard for yards penalized. You'll have to

wait for newspaper reporters' accounts of the game to get that statistic, or you can go to the internet and get it right after the game.

To the coaches, the players on the field, and the fans, the only statistic that matters at the end of the game is the one that tells us who won.

Legalism is Offensive to Yahweh and Everybody Else

It's Yahweh's job to lead us to victory. It's also His job to teach us how to play by the rules. That doesn't happen all at once. It takes practice, practice, and more practice over time. It's the same as learning to play any sport.

Yahweh doesn't call a timeout or postpone the game temporarily until we're perfect. Quite the opposite, we take the field; the whistle blows; the battle gets underway; and we learn to play as we go about our life.

Perfection isn't required or even expected at this point. We won't achieve perfection until we give up our mortal bodies and take on the immortal ones that Yahweh has prepared for us.

Legalists will go berserk when they read the last paragraph. They will point out very quickly and probably with a holier-than-thou tone in their voices that the Bible says, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5: 48)

If legalists would look in the mirror, they would see how far off the mark they are. I guess they don't use mirrors. If they do, they must look at their images through rose-colored glasses.

In Matthew 23: 24, Y'shua aimed this remark at the legalists who followed Him around from place to place trying to find something that they could use against Him:

“You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”

That was hyperbole, but He was making an important point. The crowd probably erupted into spontaneous laughter at the thought of the immaculately attired religious leaders in their long, flowing robes chomping down on camels. I think Y'shua purposely ridiculed them in front of others to teach them a lesson and to show the crowd how hypocritical and ridiculous they were.

In Luke 6: 41-42, Y'shua said,

“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you

will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.”

Y’shua left no room for doubt in anyone’s mind about where He stands when it comes to legalism. He’s against it.

Even so, Matthew 5: 48 is correct. We are supposed to be perfect, but the perfection Y’shua was talking about in that verse is a perfection that only He can confer. It wasn’t by accident that the Messiah delivered that message as a part of His Sermon on the Mount.¹ The primary purpose of that oration was to reveal Yahweh’s perspective on right living.

More than anything else, The Sermon on the Mount teaches us two things:

1. We don’t understand completely what Yahweh wants and expects from us. In fact, we’re so far off the mark that it isn’t even funny. Stated another way, Y’shua was saying that Yahweh’s view of perfection is beyond our ability to comprehend.
2. Yahweh is our Judge.

The apostle Paul had an interesting take on this subject. He’s a more credible witness than any of the legalists I know:

¹ Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7.

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of Elohim has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of Elohim through faith in Y’shua the Messiah for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of Elohim, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Messiah Y’shua; whom Elohim displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. (This was) to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of Elohim He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, (I say,) of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Y’shua. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” (Romans 3: 21-28)

That is one of the most important passages in the New Testament. It tells us in plain language that what men and women have longed for since the creation — i.e., holiness, righteousness, and salvation — can’t be obtained by obeying the Law. That’s why Paul emphasized that righteousness was manifested apart from the Law. The Law and the prophets (i.e., the Bible and more precisely, the Old Testament) merely point in the direction of the One who delivered righteousness to us.

Paul summed up his argument perfectly:

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” (Romans 3: 28)

It’s as simple as that. If you have a problem with it, then you need to accept the fact that you have a problem with Yahweh’s plan of salvation. Paul didn’t make that up. He was explaining what the Law and the prophets say.

Follow the Leading of Yahweh’s Spirit

Trying to get to Yahweh by obeying the Law is like trying to drive from Atlanta, Georgia to Charlotte, North Carolina by taking I-75.

I-75 doesn’t go to Charlotte. In fact, it doesn’t come close to Charlotte. If you take I-75 out of Atlanta, you’ll have to get off the interstate somewhere and take an alternate route that includes lots of back roads with which you’re probably not familiar.

You will need a guide. Yahweh is that Person.

According to Y’shua and Paul, faith is the only way to Yahweh, and people who have saving faith are led by Yahweh’s Spirit. You can’t sermonize those facts away.

I've said this before, but I'm going to say it again anyway because I'm purposely butchering a sacred cow. I'm not suggesting or implying that obedience is unimportant. I'm simply pointing out that obeying the laws in the Bible will not lead to salvation. On the other hand, our attitude toward those laws says a great deal about our faith.

Saving faith wants to please Yahweh. Since it pleases Yahweh when we obey Him, it makes sense that saving faith is accompanied by a desire to be obedient. But that's a far cry from believing that we are saved because of our obedience or that Yahweh owes us something if we obey Him.

There's a hymn that most Christians are familiar with, and the chorus goes like this:

"Where He leads me, I will follow. Where He leads me, I will follow. Where He leads me, I will follow, follow where He leads."

Yahweh's children are led by His Spirit. Over time, being led by Yahweh's Spirit touches every facet of our lives as He works to shape us and make us into the people He created us to be.

In the truest sense, Yahweh teaches us to play by the rules as we follow Him. That involves our hopes, dreams, and aspirations, and everything we think, do, or say. That means it includes many things that you won't find in the Bible.

How do I know?

I know it because there isn't a single verse in the Bible that has my name in it.

Nowhere in the Bible does it say, "Thus says Yahweh, Neil Snyder write a book titled *His Name is Yahweh* and take that message to the world." Yahweh's Spirit had to lead me in that direction, and my willingness to obey Him is similar to Abraham's obedience when Yahweh told him to sacrifice Isaac on the altar.

I'm not trying to puff myself up. Abraham believed Yahweh and obeyed Him. That's what I did, too. According to Y'shua and Paul and the prophets, that's what every other child of Yahweh does. If you refuse to follow Him, if you won't open your heart and listen to His voice, you don't belong to Him.

Following the rules can't make up for failing to follow Yahweh's Spirit.

Stated simply, you can obey every law in the Bible to the best of your ability as if your salvation depended on it; you can go to church every week without fail; you can read the Bible three times a day, teach a Bible class, serve as a deacon in your church, tithe religiously, sing in the choir, lead an upright life, even make a profession of faith, and still not be a child of Yahweh. Y'shua explained it like this:

“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)

That statement is as amazing as it is frightening. Y’shua said that there are people who prophesy in Yahweh’s Name, who cast out demons in His Name, and who perform miracles in His Name who will be denied admission to heaven because they did not do the will of the Father. He said it so clearly that you need help to be confused. There’s no room for misinterpretation.

What happened? Where did they go wrong?

It’s obvious that they were performing miraculous feats. Y’shua said so. They probably received lots of praise and admiration from men. Some of them must have written bestselling books telling about their exploits for “the LORD”. Others probably charged hefty speaking fees and toured the countryside giving talks to captivated audiences. Still others built megachurches where they pranced around on potted plant laden stages in front of television cameras and

adoring fans, and they pontificated about the things to come as if they actually knew.

According to the Messiah, they did all of those things in Yahweh's Name, but they were not saved.

Some of those people are going to be stunned when the Messiah looks them in the eye and says, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." The look on their faces at that moment will be sheer terror because no one will need to tell them what comes next.

This is what you need to grab hold of. If you put your faith in the Law, you can't win, but if you put your faith in Yahweh, you can't lose. It's as simple as that.

Don't try to make it any harder than it is. You'll have enough trouble dealing with the ridicule that comes your way for believing and following Yahweh.

Salvation is by Grace or it's not Real

Paul explained salvation this way:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, (it is) the gift of Elohim; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2: 8-9)

Yahweh will not be our debtor. He set things up that way in the beginning so that our salvation can't be payment for our good works. Our salvation is and always will be totally and absolutely dependent on His grace because even our faith is a gift from Him. There is no room for pride — none at all.

In Hebrews 11: 6, Paul went even further:

“And without faith it is impossible to please (Him), for he who comes to Elohim must believe that He is and (that) He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

When it comes to salvation, it's either all Yahweh and none of us, or it's all us and none of Yahweh. There is no in-between. No one can save himself. That's something that only Yahweh can do.

No matter how good we are, regardless of how hard we try to please Him, we simply can't earn our way to Yahweh because we're not perfect, and perfection is required — His perfection. That's why we have a Redeemer. He is our atoning sacrifice. He paid the price for our sins and declared us perfect, righteous, and holy. He covered us completely with His shed blood and wrapped us in His perfection as a gift for having faith in Him.

Jeremiah 23: 5-6 says that Yahweh is our righteousness and that the Messiah is Yahweh Tsidkenu

– Yahweh our Righteousness. Without Him we have no righteousness.

Isaiah 64: 6 says,

“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

That message is all over the Bible, and it’s central to salvation. You reject it at your own peril.

Despite what the Bible says, some people can’t accept the fact that salvation is by grace through faith. They insist on believing that they can, that they should, that they must earn their way to Yahweh. It’s ironic because simply trying to earn your way to Him is sinful. People who do it may as well stand on the rooftop and yell as loud as they can, “I don’t have a clue what salvation is.”

Trying to earn your way to Yahweh is stumbling over the Stumbling Stone.² It’s unfortunate that the thought of earning salvation is so seductive and compelling. It makes sense from a human perspective because most of us think that no one would ever give us anything.

But Yahweh isn’t like us. He’s our Redeemer, and He loves us enough to die for us – to pay the price

² See Isaiah 8: 14-15.

for the sins that we've committed and will commit with His shed blood.

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians because they had drifted toward legalism. Below are a few excerpts from Galatians that illustrate these points:

“Grace to you and peace from Elohim our Father and the Lord Y’shua the Messiah, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our Elohim and Father,...., I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of the Messiah, for a different gospel; which is (really) not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of the Messiah. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!.... For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but (I received it) through a revelation of Y’shua the Messiah.... nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Messiah Y’shua, even we have believed in Messiah Y’shua, so that we may be justified by faith in the Messiah and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.... For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to Elohim. I

have been crucified with the Messiah; and it is no longer I who live, but the Messiah lives in me; and the (life) which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of Elohim, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of Elohim, for if righteousness (comes) through the Law, then the Messiah died needlessly.... You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Y'shua the Messiah was publicly portrayed (as) crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?.... Now that no one is justified by the Law before Elohim is evident; for, 'the righteous man shall live by faith'.... Is the Law then contrary to the promises of Elohim? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.... But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Y'shua the Messiah might be given to those who believe." (Galatians 1: 3-4, 6-8, 11-12; 2: 16, 19-21; 3: 1-3, 11, 21-22)

Paul was irate because the Galatians had substituted obedience to the Law for faith in Yahweh. In other words, they had become legalistic. He said that whoever spread that nonsense was cursed. Paul even

went so far as to call the Galatians “foolish”, and he asked them who had bewitched them.

Anyone can be deceived or seduced into believing that strict obedience makes us special in Yahweh’s eyes, but it doesn’t. The only thing that makes us right with Yahweh is faith in the Person who made the atoning sacrifice for our sins. That Person is Yahweh.

Next comes obedience, and it’s not limited to obedience to the Law. In fact, following the leading of Yahweh’s Spirit is the highest form of obedience.

Remember the football metaphor. Playing by the rules doesn’t necessarily put points on the scoreboard. When the game is over, the team with the most points is the winner.

We score points with Yahweh by faithfully following the leading of His Spirit. For that, there is no substitute.

Legalism is Not a New Problem

I think legalism is the biggest problem we face today as a body of believers in the Messiah. The prophets dealt with it too.³

³ For example, see Amos 4: 4-5, Isaiah 1: 11-17, Isaiah 58; and Malachi 1-3.

So, legalism isn't a new problem. Since the creation, legalists have been making the classic mistake of believing and teaching others that we need to earn salvation by doing good works. Typically, they take great pride in their accomplishments because they think that's what sets them apart from other less devout believers.

Make no mistake. Legalists think they have a special place in Yahweh's kingdom — i.e., that they're better than everybody else. They'll deny it vehemently if you say something to them about it, but their words, actions, and the smug looks on their faces give them away.

They remind me of a person that Ray Stevens sang about in his song "Mississippi Squirrel Revival". Her name was Sister Bertha Better-than-you. If you're not familiar with the song, you can watch it on YouTube.⁴ You'll be glad you did. When I hear those lyrics, I think about all the legalists I know and laugh.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

In the Garden of Eden, there were many trees. Adam and Eve were free to eat from all of them — except one. Yahweh told Adam,

"From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;
but from the tree of the knowledge of good and

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K16fG1sDagU>

evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2: 16-17)

Why did Yahweh tell Adam and Eve to avoid eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? The answer is so simple that it’s almost scary.

Yahweh wanted them to have an intimate, personal relationship with Him and to follow Him. If they had followed Yahweh, they wouldn’t have needed the fruit from that tree because Yahweh’s path always leads to good.

Yahweh wants us to follow Him. That’s what He has wanted since the beginning.

Satan tempted Eve. She took a bite from the apple and shared it with Adam. Their sin set in motion the rebellion against Yahweh that has continued to this day. It all started with a desire to know good and evil, right and wrong.

Do you get the point? Adam and Eve wanted to know all the laws in the Bible.

Eve’s desire wasn’t innocent. I’m sure you recall how Satan seduced her. He said,

“For Elohim knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like Elohim, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3: 5)

Eve wanted to be like Yahweh. That's what the Bible says. She didn't want to be dependent on Him for anything.

Remember what Jeremiah 23: 5-6 says. Yahweh is our righteousness, so we are totally dependent on Him for salvation. Nothing we do can change that, and we should be thankful that He has covered us with His perfect righteousness. Literally, we have no righteousness apart from Him.

Satan's modus operandi hasn't changed. He's still trying to seduce us. Don't be deceived by his evil tricks. Legalism is just as wrong now as it was then.

Self-Righteousness is a Prelude to Disaster

In Matthew 21: 31-32, Y'shua said,

"...Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of Elohim before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing (this,) did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him."
(Matthew 21: 31-32)

Was the Messiah condoning prostitution and thievery? Not a chance! He was pointing out that the most despicable people in Israel (tax collectors and prostitutes) believed John the Baptist's message; they

repented; and they were saved by faith. The most religious people in Israel rejected John's message.

Why? Pay careful attention because the answer is very important. They thought they didn't need to repent. They believed that they were on the pathway that leads to Yahweh already and that John the Baptist was a lunatic.

No one is on the right path unless he receives Yahweh by faith. Nothing else will do, so ignore the legalists and get on board with Yahweh's plan.

Now, take a look at the Messiah's closing comments to the religious leaders. If you believe Him, these remarks will warm your heart. If you tend to be self-righteous, they should chill you to the bone:

"Y'shua said to them, 'Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner (stone); this came about from Yahweh, and it is marvelous in our eyes?' Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of Elohim will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.'" (Matthew 21: 42-44)

The Messiah is the Stone that Y'shua mentioned in these verses, so don't take this message lightly. Yahweh doesn't. In essence, He is the Stumbling Stone.

Either you will fall on Him and be broken, or He will fall on you and you'll be crushed to smithereens.

Now, look at Matthew 21: 45-46:

“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.”

The chief priests and Pharisees understood the Messiah correctly. He was saying that the kingdom of Elohim would be taken away from them, not the Jewish people, and given to others.

Some Christians have interpreted Matthew 21: 42-44 to mean that Yahweh's kingdom was taken away from the Jewish people. That's simply not true. He removed His mantle from the religious leadership.

Bearing Fruit Isn't Our Job

I've heard lots of believers talk about the importance of “bearing fruit for the LORD”, but bearing fruit isn't our job. Bearing fruit is Yahweh's job. He uses us in the process if we follow Him.

Only Yahweh can lead people to Him or do anything else that He calls “good.” Anything that we do to assist Him is out of the generosity of Yahweh's heart. Don't make the mistake of believing that Yahweh

depends on people like you and me to bear fruit for Him. He doesn't. It's our privilege to be a part of His work. That's the correct way to think about it.

According to the Messiah,

"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then you will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7: 16-20)

But Paul said,

"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." (Romans 7: 18)

Those apparently contradictory passages from the New Testament are easy to reconcile when you understand that only Yahweh is responsible for bearing fruit. Paul suggested as much when he inserted the phrase "in my flesh" in Romans 7: 18.

You will bear fruit (notice that I said *will* — not *might*) if you follow the leading of Yahweh's Spirit, and you won't have to try to bear fruit any more than a

peach tree has to try to produce peaches. It happens automatically.

Yahweh makes sure that peach trees bear peaches, not thorns and thistles, and all the orchard owner has to do is kill a few weeds, prune the trees, and pick the fruit. Yahweh makes sure that His children bear fruit as well. That's His job, not ours.

Speaking about Yahweh's children, Psalm 1: 3 says,

"He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers."

You *will* bear fruit in your season if you follow Yahweh. Just like the peach tree, there are times when you aren't expected to bear fruit. Rest assured that when your season comes, you will be ready if you are following the leading of Yahweh's Spirit. It's His job to prepare you to bear fruit, and it's His job to actually bear the fruit. We assist Him, and we can thank Yahweh that He allows us to help.

No matter how hard you try, if you don't follow the leading of Yahweh's Spirit, it's impossible to bear fruit that He calls "good." As Paul said, in your flesh you can do nothing. The Messiah said it this way:

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15: 5)

When you abide in Yahweh, or let Him take control, He can do seemingly impossible things through you. Your goal should be to abide in Him and to let Him abide in you. There is no other way to bear fruit that Yahweh calls “good.”

Stop trying to bear fruit for Yahweh and learn to abide in Him. Then He will bear fruit through you. He knows how to bear fruit, and He is able to prepare you to bear fruit for Him if you will let Him.

If you don’t abide in and follow Him, you won’t bear fruit. According to the Messiah, if you don’t follow the leading of Yahweh’s Spirit and bear fruit, He will cut you down and throw you into the fire.⁵ That’s not where you want to end up.

Back to the Basics

Please remember that I’m not saying or implying that the laws in the Bible are unimportant, and neither was Y’shua. He was simply putting the laws in the proper perspective.

We should study the Scriptures. We should do our best to be obedient to Yahweh’s word. We should

⁵ Matthew 7: 19.

seek to do good deeds, but our goal, our quest, our mission must be to follow the leading of Yahweh's Spirit. As I said, for that there is no substitute.

Our good deeds, no matter how good we think they are, simply don't stand up under close scrutiny. They could never earn us a spot in heaven. Remember what Isaiah said about our righteousness:

"For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."
(Isaiah 64: 6)

By the same token, nothing we do can take away our spot in heaven once it's been granted. Paul explained it this way:

"(For I am) confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Messiah Y'shua." (Philippians 1: 6)

That's Yahweh's job, and He's good at it.

Beyond Salvation

Hebrews is one of my favorite books in the Bible. I can't explain why, but the first time I read it, it touched me in a powerful way. Each time that I've read it since then, it's had a similar effect.

Paul wrote Hebrews to Jewish people. It begins by explaining who Y'shua is:

“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent Name than they.”
(Hebrews 1: 3-4)

It wasn't until the year 2000 that I really understood the meaning of those verses. Y'shua is Yahweh, and the Name He inherited that is much better than the names of the angels is Yahweh.

As a believer, I knew that Y'shua is Elohim the Son, but I had no idea how important that was. Eventually, Yahweh directed me to write a book about His Name, and the process of writing it proved to be the most rewarding experience of my life.

I'll never forget a day in October 2000. I already knew that I was supposed to write the book, but for some reason I wasn't allowed to begin. That's a big deal for me, because the secret to writing a book is getting started.

Once a writing project is underway, finishing it isn't a problem for me. But Yahweh wasn't ready, and I

didn't know why. That day in October 2000 stands out in my mind because I decided to schedule an entire day to get the ball rolling. Early that morning, I went through my normal routine, but nothing happened.

After several hours of praying and thinking about the book, I finally gave up and went out to play golf. I lived on a golf course, so I didn't have to go very far. In fact, I had a golf cart in my garage. All I had to do was drive it to the first tee.

On the third hole, it happened. A thought came into my mind, and I knew immediately that it wasn't my thought. It was actually a question: "Do you know why you haven't been permitted to start writing the book?"

I didn't know the answer, and I said, "No." Immediately I got the answer: "Before you can write about My Name, you must understand what an honor it is to be selected for this purpose."

Tears came to my eyes immediately as I began to grasp the awesome privilege that Yahweh had bestowed on me. His Name is the Name that is above every name.⁶ It's the Name to which every knee will bow when He returns,⁷ and it's the only Name "under heaven by which we must be saved."⁸

⁶ Philippians 2: 9.

⁷ Philippians 2: 10 and Isaiah 45: 23.

⁸ Acts 4: 12.

On the third hole at Glenmore Country Club in Keswick, Virginia as I was preparing to make my approach shot to the green, John 3: 18 came into my mind. It's a somewhat obscure verse, especially when compared with its nearby neighbor — John 3: 16:

“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of Elohim.” (John 3: 18)

When I became a believer, I thought that John 3: 18 refers to the Name “Jesus”, but I was wrong. Jesus is the English transliteration of the Greek word “Iesous”, but the Name He was given at birth was “Y’shua”, not Jesus. Now I was getting further clarification.

The Name of the Son of Elohim by which we must be saved isn't Jesus or Y'shua or Yahshua. It's Yahweh. Then Isaiah 43: 11 came into my mind: “I, even I, am Yahweh, and there is no Savior besides Me.”

His Name is Yahweh

Before I go any further, I want to repeat an important point. Salvation is by grace through faith in a Person, and that Person is Yahweh. For years we've mistakenly called Him Jesus, but as I said, His Name at birth was Y'shua, not Jesus. Moreover, the Messiah is Yahweh; Yahweh is our Savior and our Redeemer; and Yahweh will return at the End of Days.

In the 2nd century B.C., Jewish rabbis forbade the use of Yahweh's Name ostensibly to prevent Jewish people from blaspheming His Name. In the 4th century A.D., vowel markings were introduced in the Hebrew language, and the Name of Yahweh in Hebrew was altered intentionally by Jewish rabbis by placing the vowel markings for the Hebrew word "Adonai" (meaning Lord) on the Name "Yahweh".

That produced a word with the sound "YeHoVaH," and that is how we got the Name "Jehovah." Their goal was to prevent Jewish people from accidentally reading Yahweh's Name aloud.

In the 17th century A.D., the King James translators of the Bible continued this tradition by rendering the Name "Yahweh" as Jehovah, and they adopted the practice of disguising Yahweh's Name in the Scriptures by substituting "the LORD" or "the Lord GOD" where the Name "Yahweh" actually appears in the Bible. The *New American Standard Bible* and the *New International Version* follow that tradition as well. That's why most Christians today have never heard the Name "Yahweh," and that's why the true identity of the Messiah has been obscured.

His Name is Yahweh was written specifically to deal with that problem.

Again, salvation is by grace through faith in a Person, and that Person is Yahweh. This is a serious issue, because Yahweh intends for us to know His Name

and to declare it to the world. Those facts are as firmly rooted in the Scriptures as the plan of salvation. If they're new to you, then you've got some work to do.

I urge you to get a copy of *His Name is Yahweh: Revised Edition*, and read it carefully. You can download a copy of it in PDF format for free at www.snydertalk.com or you can buy it in paperback or eBook from Amazon. Check everything in it against the Scriptures, and pay attention to what the Bible says about Yahweh's Name.

The Authentic Swing

Playing golf that day in October 2000 was very peculiar because my mind was racing through Bible verses and passages that Yahweh had impressed upon me years earlier. All of them were connected in my mind, and they related to me personally.

Yahweh was leading me down a path that would result in my writing *His Name is Yahweh*, this book, and other books. It was a completely different path for me. The path that I had been on for decades was coming to an end.

I guess you could say that I had a choice to make. I could obey Yahweh by following His leading, or I could decide to continue doing what I had been doing successfully for years. But it didn't seem like I was being offered a choice. It felt like Yahweh was giving me specific instructions about a job that I was

born (or created) to do. At that moment, the only thing that mattered to me was doing what Yahweh wanted me to do.

Many people who enter academia dream about getting tenure at a great university and becoming chaired professors. That was never my dream. I used to tell the students in my leadership class, “I still don’t know what I want to be when I grow up.”

They got a kick out of that, but my point was that our journey in life isn’t complete until we stop breathing. As long as we’re alive, we still have work to do, and it may not be the work we’re doing now.

I never thought that my destiny in life was to teach business at a university. I was letting my students know that they should be prepared to follow their passions and dreams wherever they lead without regard for their age or their level of success in their current profession.

I was tenured in 1981 after three years at the University of Virginia; I became a full professor in 1987; and I became a chaired professor in 1991. Yahweh was leading me to walk away from things that most university faculty work a lifetime to accomplish but never attain.

None of that mattered to me. Walking away from university life was one of the easiest decisions I’ve ever made. Just as important, my wife Katie was excited

about the change we were about to make. Yahweh had taken care of every detail. All I had to do was follow Him. Like I said, I guess I could have decided not to follow Yahweh's leading, but that was out of the question.

Several years earlier, John Welborn, a friend from Charlottesville, Virginia, had given me a book to read. John is a very good golfer, and he played on the University of North Carolina golf team. Frequently, John and I talked about the similarities between golf and life, and the book he wanted me to read dealt with that issue.

The book was *The Legend of Bagger Vance*. It's a good book. I enjoyed reading it very much. Bagger Vance's description of "the Authentic Swing" stood out in my mind:

"I believe that each of us possesses, inside ourselves, one true Authentic Swing that is ours alone. It is folly to try to teach us another, or mold us to some ideal version of the perfect swing. Each player possesses only that one swing that he was born with, that swing which existed within him before he ever picked up a club. Like the statue of David, our Authentic Swing already exists, concealed within the stone, so to speak."⁹

⁹ Pressfield, Steven. *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, William Morrow & Company, New York, 1995, p. 68.

If you haven't read the book, you should. Robert Redford bought the rights to make the book into a movie, and he directed it as well. The movie is good, but nowhere near as good as the book.

In the movie, Will Smith plays Bagger Vance; Matt Damon plays Rannulph Junah; and Charlize Theron plays Adele Invergordon. Although Adele Invergordon is a major character in the movie, she makes little more than a cameo appearance in the book.

Rannulph Junah was a great amateur golfer before he fought in World War I. The war disrupted his life, sent him spiraling out of control, and destroyed his interest in the game. In the book, Bagger Vance befriended Junah in Europe following a battle during which Junah was severely injured, and he spent a lot of time with Junah helping him discover his "true self" — the person he was created to be.

Most of the book is a running dialogue between Vance, Junah, and Vance's helper, a young boy named Hardy Greaves, during a golf match that Adele Invergordon arranged to save The Links at Krewe Island from financial ruin. It's a fictitious golf course and resort that her father built near Savannah, Georgia.

The match is between legendary golfers Bobby Jones and Walter Hagen and the hometown war hero from Savannah — Rannulph Junah. Bagger Vance is an elderly black man who caddies for Junah. Throughout

the match he gives Junah advice that eventually restores him to health.

It isn't perfectly clear in the movie, but in the book, it's crystal clear. Bagger Vance is Yahweh, and He uses the golf match to help Junah confront and deal with the demons in his life. More than anything else, Bagger focuses Junah's attention on discovering his Authentic Swing —or as Bagger would say, allowing his Authentic Swing to find him.

The moral of the story comes straight from the Bible. Each one of us was born for a specific purpose, and our quest should be to let that purpose find us. The only person or thing capable of preventing that from happening is us.

It reminds me of a caption in a Pogo cartoon that I saw several years ago:

“We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

You are the only person capable of preventing Yahweh from doing through you what He created you to do. If you stand in His way and resist His attempts to move you down the path that you were created to follow, you'll only hurt yourself.

Steven Pressfield, author of *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, used golf metaphors to drive that point home. He depicted Yahweh as a gentle Servant guiding and directing his player — Rannulph Junah. Junah had to

play the game, but Yahweh had to guide him each step of the way.

That's the way it's supposed to be. As Vance told Junah, and I'm paraphrasing, "I've been with you all along, and I'll never leave you." That's a great way to explain how Yahweh operates.

Press on to Maturity

On the 3rd hole at Glenmore Country Club, my whole world changed in ways that I couldn't have imagined at that time. I was about to leave the comfort of a world that I knew and take a completely different path with which I was totally unfamiliar. Today, I still don't know precisely where my path leads or how I will get to the end, but I do know Who I am supposed to follow.

For the first time in my life, I felt like I was on the right path. That seems strange coming from me. I've always been a goal-oriented person, and I have a Ph.D. degree in strategic management. I understand setting goals and developing strategies and tactics to achieve them as well as anyone I know.

Up to that point, my whole life had been about setting and achieving goals, but in October 2000 for the first time I really understood that Yahweh's goals are supposed to be my goals. I also understood that I can't achieve my goals without Him. In fact, trying to achieve them without Him is actually disobedience because He

said that He expects to be intimately involved with us each step of the way. If He isn't, then we're on the wrong path.

As I said, Hebrews has meant a great deal to me over the years, and Yahweh used it in October 2000 to teach me a lesson that every one of us needs to learn. It's time to press on to maturity — to move beyond traditional notions about obedience.

This is important, so it bears repeating. The obedience that Yahweh demands is more than strict adherence to all the laws in the Bible. As Paul said, saving faith is faith that is willing to go where Yahweh leads.

We can't get to our destination on our own. If we want to reach it, we must have faith in Yahweh and go where He leads.

This passage from Hebrews deals with what I'm talking about:

“Concerning Him (Y'shua) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of Elohim, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the Word of righteousness, for he

is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Messiah, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward Elohim, of instructions about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if Elohim permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of Elohim and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of Elohim and put Him to open shame.

For ground that drinks the rain which falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from Elohim; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned." (Hebrews 5: 11-6: 8)

To understand Hebrews 5: 11 through 6: 8 correctly, you must put it in context. Paul had just explained that the Children of Israel who participated in the Exodus from Egypt were eyewitnesses to the ten

plagues; they walked across dry land when Yahweh parted the Red Sea; they were led day and night by Yahweh who appeared in the form of a column of smoke by day and a column of fire by night; they ate manna from heaven and drank water from a rock; they watched while Yahweh descended from heaven to the top of Mount Sinai; and they heard His Voice as He proclaimed the Ten Commandments.

The Children of Israel had witnessed the most spectacular events in the history of the world, and they weren't just casual observers. They were actively involved in the whole process and in close physical proximity with Yahweh Himself.

More than any other group of people in the history of the world, they should have had faith in Yahweh, but they didn't. The advantage of being so close to the action and to Yahweh Himself didn't help them one bit.

Making matters worse, they rebelled against Yahweh again and again in the wilderness. Because they lacked faith in Him, they were not permitted to enter His rest or the Promised Land.¹⁰

In Hebrews 5: 11 through 6: 8, Paul was telling Jewish people not to follow their example. They were attempting unsuccessfully to please Yahweh by obeying all the laws in the Scriptures, and all the while they were

¹⁰ Hebrews 3: 7-19.

ignoring the one thing that Yahweh requires—faith in Him.

Yahweh wanted their hearts, and He longed for them to demonstrate faith by following Him. Absent that, Paul said they would fail miserably just as surely as their predecessors had fallen short in the wilderness.

The obedience that Yahweh requires is based on faith in Him. As I said, it's a higher form of obedience than simply complying with the Law — even the Ten Commandments.

Paul didn't say or suggest that the Ten Commandments and the other laws in the Bible are unimportant or that people can disobey them without fear of consequence. As I've explained, I'm not saying that either.

Paul simply said that Yahweh expects much more from us than that. He wants us to follow Him and to allow Him to make us into the people that He created us to be. Since we can't do that on our own, faith in Yahweh is an absolute must. Again, there is no substitute for faith.

Our primary objective must be to actually do Yahweh's will.¹¹ In Hebrews 6: 7-8, Paul presents two possible outcomes for our life's journey:

¹¹ Matthew 7: 21, John 3: 36, and Romans 8: 14.

“For ground that drinks the rain which falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from Elohim; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.”

Yahweh blesses people who follow Him, but those who continually soak up His blessings and produce nothing to advance His agenda will suffer a different fate. Paul wasn't prone to levity when He made references to hell, so I urge you to take him seriously.

It's time to exercise faith and press on to maturity. As tempting as it is for us to think that we can please Yahweh by adhering strictly to all the laws in the Bible, that is not the path to success.

Salvation is by grace through faith in Yahweh that is evidenced by our willingness to actually follow the leading of His Spirit. Nothing else will do.

Yahweh is not a hard taskmaster. He said,

“For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
(Matthew 11: 30)

The only sensible thing for us to do is to follow Him.