

BACK TO THE BIBLE

BIBLICAL SALVATION

(TITUS 2:11, 12)

During His ministry, Jesus granted salvation to a palsied man (Matthew 9:2), a sinful woman caught in adultery (John 8:11), Zaccheus (Luke 19:9), and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43). What He gave to these individuals on earth was just a foretaste of the salvation to follow in His kingdom, the church (Colossians 1:13, 14).

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON SALVATION

Salvation is both a present and a future matter for us (Romans 13:11). The full realization of salvation in the future depends on conditions we accept now. Our present salvation is the forgiveness of sins (1 John 2:12), and our future salvation is eternal bliss in heaven (1 Peter 1:4, 5). We are primarily concerned with our present salvation and with our continued growth in righteousness. If we respond obediently to God now, our future will be certain (Revelation 2:10).

Since we sin the same way man has always sinned, we obtain salvation from sin in the only way God has ever provided. Sin is still the same—whether lying, murder, or theft—and the means of removing the guilt of sin is the same as that revealed in the New Testament in the first century.

Three requirements must be met in order to enjoy salvation:

First, we must have *the proper knowledge of the grace of God* (Ephesians 2:8). God's grace is expressed to us in sending His only begotten Son to the world (John 3:16). This grace is offered to man *in Christ* (1 Corinthians 1:4; 2 Timothy 2:10). We are told to *labor* in that grace so that we do not receive it in vain (1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 6:1).

Second, we must understand the *sacrifice of Christ* that made possible our salvation (Hebrews 2:9; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). By His blood He provided a way for man to come to God and escape the guilt of sin (Romans 3:24, 25).

Third, we must accept the revelation of God's

terms of salvation. Salvation is freely offered to all men (Titus 2:11, 12), but not all men accept the offer (Matthew 7:13, 14). God's saving grace is offered on the conditions of faith (2 Timothy 3:15) and obedience (Hebrews 5:8, 9). That obedience finds expression in *repentance* from sin (2 Corinthians 7:10), *confession* of Christ as the Son of God (Romans 10:10), and *baptism* for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16).

The gospel is the power God uses to move sinners to accept the salvation He has provided (Romans 1:16). He demands obedience to the gospel message (1 Peter 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9). When this obedience is followed by a life of faithful service, the Christian can enter his eternal home (2 Corinthians 5:1).

APOSTASY FROM BIBLICAL TEACHING ON SALVATION

The teaching and practice of the conditions of salvation as taught in the New Testament were lost during the dark ages of apostasy. The first departure was to present salvation as being dependent on a "condition of the offer" instead of being a gift from God. That is what is meant by the "sacramental" idea of salvation. This teaching began with Tertullian about A.D. 200. Augustine defined the sacraments as a "visible form of an invisible grace," with saving power in the outward acts themselves.

For instance, baptism came to be looked upon as having power in itself to wash away sins. After Augustine taught that children were born guilty of Adam's sin, the Church began to baptize babies. The people believed that the act of baptism alone could bring forgiveness of original sin.

The Council of Trent authorized seven sacramental acts: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and marriage. The Catholic Church today still recognizes these seven acts as sacraments. During the Reformation Movement, the Protestant churches rejected

all but two acts as sacramental. Baptism and the Lord's Supper were retained. Most members of reformed denominations believe that baptism washes away original sin, so they sprinkle babies. Many also believe that partaking of the Lord's Supper provides forgiveness of sins because Jesus said His blood was shed for the remission of sins. They fail to distinguish between the act of Christ and drinking of the cup in memory of that act.

Because the Catholic Church insisted that salvation comes by works, most of the Protestant churches swung to the other extreme and taught that forgiveness of personal sins comes by faith alone, apart from any work man may do in obedience to God. This caused them to reject the idea that obedience to God's commands has anything to do with a man's forgiveness of personal sins (as distinguished from original sin).

Man cannot change God's plan of salvation and be saved, for it is a process of new birth. It operates as uniformly as the natural birth and results only from obedience to God's commands.

THE NEED TO RETURN TO BIBLICAL TEACHING ON SALVATION

Common errors taught today on the subject of salvation were actually settled in the New Testament, before the errors came into existence. Faith without works is dead (James 2:14–26), and

doing works without the right kind of faith is to no avail (Hebrews 11:6; Titus 3:5).

The faith taught in the Bible must include obedience, and obedience must always be accompanied by faith (Romans 1:5). Human effort in obeying the commands of God is necessary for salvation, but no one can claim any merit for this effort (Ephesians 2:8–10). God's grace provides salvation, and God through His grace bestows salvation on the faithful obedient. "Not of works" refers to man's works alone. God provides salvation through grace; man cannot put Him under obligation to do so.

God alone saves man, but man must meet the conditions on which God promises salvation: faith (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24), repentance (Acts 17:30), confession of faith in Jesus as God's Son (Romans 10:9, 10), and baptism (Acts 10:48; 22:16).

We need not swing to one extreme with Catholicism to think that salvation comes by work, or to the other extreme with Protestantism to believe that salvation is by faith "alone." We must return to the biblical truth that faith and obedience to God's commands are necessary. That will make our salvation from sin a reality, and a faithful life will make our eternal bliss secure (Philippians 3:20; 2 Corinthians 5:1).¹

¹This lesson was adapted from Harvey A. Childress, *Back to the Bible* (Minneapolis: By the author, 1958), 54–57. Adapted and used by permission.