

Saving Faith (Part 2)

One of the biggest problems throughout the history of the church is the false notion of what truly constitutes saving faith. Even from the very beginning of the church we see a schism which developed between Jewish converts and Gentile converts. The Jewish converts sought to pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ by teaching that a person could be saved in Christ as long as they first of all converted to Judaism and kept the Law of Moses. By teaching this, these Judaizers, as they were called, were making Christ's sacrifice meaningless. They were saying the blood He shed on the Cross of Calvary was not enough, and when they said and taught this, the Apostle Paul pointed out to them that they had fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4).

Although I would disagree with their conclusion, there are some scholars who believe this schism was so strong that James, the Lord's brother and one of the leaders of the church at Jerusalem, and the Lord's hand-picked Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, were so at odds with each other to the point they were teaching different gospel plans of salvation. As evidence of this schism they point to Paul's words in his *Epistle to the Galatians* when he states, "**For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party**" (Galatians 2:12 [RSV]). Some of these scholars point to the *Epistle of James* as further evidence that James was deliberately countering the Apostle Paul's claim to the Ephesians that **8. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – 9. not because of works, lest any man should boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9 [RSV]) Lastly, they say that when a historian by the name of Hegeppus reported that James' knees were so worn from his daily crawling up the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem in supplication and prayer that they acquired the hardness of the knees of a camel. From this they say that James was showing his complete rejection of Paul's teaching.

One thing they fail to realize, however, and it is this. Just as the Apostle Paul did not teach that a Gentile had to become converted to Judaism in order to be saved, the reverse is equally true. Neither did he teach that a Jew had to stop being a Jew in order to be a Christian. In other words, as long as one realized that the festivals and Sabbaths and the customs of the Jews did nothing towards one's salvation, then a person could go ahead and observe all of these if they chose to. It is a matter of one's own conscience before God. That is why Paul stated in Romans 14:4-6 [RSV], **4. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand. 5. One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind. 6. He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.**

So there was no schism that existed between Paul and James in which they were teaching different gospel plans of salvation. When Paul said we are saved by the grace of God through no works of our own, and when James said, ***“Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith”*** (James 2:18b [RSV]), they were saying the same thing. Works do not save. What saves us is the sacrifice of Jesus when we come to Him in obedient, saving faith. As saved individuals, then, we do good works because we are saved, which is also exactly what Jesus taught when He said, ***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in Heaven”*** (Matthew 5:16 [RSV]). We do good works because we are saved in order that others may see them and glorify God in Heaven.

As an offshoot of this problem of misunderstanding grace and faith in the gospel plan of salvation is an improper misunderstanding of the word ***believe*** as it is used in the King James Version of the Bible. English words change their meanings through time. For instance, in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 the King James Version reads as follows: ***“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”*** When we see this word ***“let”*** today we think it means “allow.” However, at the time the King James Version was translated just the opposite was meant by the word ***“let”***: It meant to hinder or to prevent. A modern and accurate translation of this verse shows what is really meant: ***“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.”***

The point I am making is that we must be careful when studying God’s word. Just as the meaning of this verse from 2 Thessalonians has changed because the English language has changed, so, too, has the meaning of belief changed. A while back I had noticed in my Bible studies that Mark 16:16, which is translated thusly in the ESV as ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned,”*** which is pretty much in line with most translations, may not be accurate, and the mistranslation may have caused much damage to the world for centuries. I believe that a better rendering would be the following, which would have led to much less confusion regarding the purpose and place of baptism in the gospel plan of salvation: ***“Whoever OBEYS and is baptized will be saved, but whoever DISOBEYS will be condemned.”***

In the original Greek text the word translated ***believes*** by the King James Version really is better understood in our language today as obeys. Therefore, it becomes quite clear what Jesus is teaching. He who obeys His command to be baptized will be saved. He who disobeys that command will be lost. God’s word has never taught that mental affirmation of saying “I believe” was what was required for salvation. As James says, ***“Even the Demons believe – and shudder.”*** (James 2:19 [RSV]) No, saving faith has always required obedience, and never just mental assent, as is taught erroneously by so many denominations today.

John 3:16, when correctly translated today, also shows how obedience is being taught, and not just mental assent. ***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever OBEYS in Him should not perish but have eternal life."***

This passage is now even more compatible with Paul's statement in Galatians 3:26-27 [ESV]: ***26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.***

Our being ***in*** Christ gives us our blessings as His siblings, and when we obey ***in*** Christ we are ***in*** Christ because we have put ***on*** Christ.

The teaching of obedience in John 3:16 is also underscored by the fact that just twenty verses later — in John 3:36, disobedience is shown to be the direct opposite of what is translated as belief. And since the expression is identical in John 3:16, then it, too, is better translated as obey rather than merely to believe. Here is John 3:36 as it appears in many versions of the Bible that have been influenced by William Tyndale [ESV]: ***"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."***

But what this verse actually says is this: ***"Whoever OBEYS in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."***

If such change is acknowledged, then Jesus had a salvation doctrine directly contrary to the standard interpretation Martin Luther disciples ascribe to the Apostle Paul's teaching. A notion of salvation resulting from obedience is contrary to what many believe the Bible teaches due to false teaching, but one in which the Lord's church has always been teaching. It seems to me this interpretation ***is*** correct and it overcomes many objections that "faith only" adherents have that teach "mental assent" is all one needs to obtain salvation in Christ.

All of the fruits of uncleanness that come against the spirit of the law must be put off. Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communication all come against the spirit of the law. You can be angry without cause and vindicate yourself against your neighbor in your heart even though you have not done so in fact. You may have kept the letter of the law, but you have broken the spirit of the law by the fact that you are angry without cause. You must mortify, you must put to death, that wrong attitude. Ephesians 4:23-27 says, ***"...and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak truth each one with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. Be angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath (put off the wrong attitude): neither give place to the devil."***

The exercise of saving faith that works through love is to crucify that old man of sin. We see this in Galatians 5:24-26, which says, ***"And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof. If we live by the Spirit,***

by the Spirit let us also walk. Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another.” This means that we should put into practice what Jesus said were the first and second greatest commandments, which are to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Satan loves to take the truth out of its context by teaching partial truths. One can take a profound truth out of context and make a bald-faced lie. It happens every day, and it does happen sometimes from pulpits. Satan uses the truth of God to make a lie.

For example, Satan loves to teach the partial truth that it is only by the blood of Christ that we can be saved. Romans 5:9 says, **“Much more then, being now justified by His blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”** That is positively true! That is the word of God! But if it is used out of its context with other truths it can be used to make a blasphemous lie! One can use that verse to say that if one has accepted Jesus, His blood justifies them without repentance, thus continuing to live in sin. They think they are saved, and have eternal life, but in actuality they are still as lost as they ever were.

Being justified in His blood is only half of salvation; it is two-fold. Satan would like to convey the impression that one is saved when one is not. Justification alone is not sufficient unto salvation.

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in us to cleanse us from our sin is as essential as the blood to remove the guilt of sin. We need a two-fold salvation; we need to be purged from the guilt of our sin and purged from corruption and filth of our sin. If the penalty is taken away, but we continue on in the pollution of sin, we are not saved. Hebrews 10:26 says, **“For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins....”** Why? Because we have taken the blood of Jesus and put it under the soles of our feet, trampling upon it. We will be counted worthy of death.

Justification cannot be separated from sanctification. We need the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to deliver us from the pollution and power of sin as well as justification by the blood of Christ to save us from the penalty of sin – they are co-essential! John 3:5 says, **“Jesus answered, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, except one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God!’”** I see a lot of people that claim they are justified by the blood and know nothing of being born of water and the Spirit. The spirit of the law means nothing to them. Having their sins washed away as they put on Christ in baptism means nothing to them.

Unless we understand that work whereby the new man is created within us with new desires, we have no more salvation than one who has never heard the name of Jesus. This is the teaching of the gospel. **“Except one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”** Water signifies cleansing, washing; we must be cleansed by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Without this one cannot enter into the service of God. This means you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. A right motive

is required to serve God. He will not accept your service until your heart and attitudes have been changed, becoming a new creation with love as your motive.

As long as a person is serving God legalistically under the letter of the law, you have not entered the Kingdom of God. For example, a person would not commit a murder because the law says that one shall not kill, but that same person thinks nothing of blasting his neighbor with hatred and contempt. You cannot enter the Kingdom of God until you have been born again through baptism.

Titus 3:5 tells us, “**...not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit....**” We are saved **through** the washing of regeneration as well as **by** the blood of Christ. We need both. The new man must be created within us.

Salvation is clearly two-fold: It consists of being justified in a legal sense, and then experiencing “**...the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit....**” We are saved “**...through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**” through sanctification. We need both. We must be able to stand justified before the courts of Heaven before the law, legally pardoned, which takes away the guilt of our sin, but we must also be delivered and redeemed from sin. Until we have both, we do not have salvation.

We owe our salvation not only to the Son, but also to all three persons of the Trinity. Salvation is not of Christ alone. It is of the complete Godhead.

First, it was the Father. We owe our salvation primarily to God the Father Who chose to bring salvation to us. That salvation was the price of the life and blood of His Son.

See what we read in 1 Peter 1:2: “**...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.**”

That verse speaks of foreknowledge as an intimate relationship as in a marriage union. It is speaking of intimacy of love that God the Father had for His people. We were given salvation through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit unto obedience of faith. Do you see now how all three Persons of the Godhead are involved in salvation? There we see God the Father chose, due to His intimate relationship of love that He had for His people, and sent His Son and the Holy Spirit. See that it was “**...in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ....**” The Father foreknew the plan of salvation, and Jesus Christ is the author of that salvation (Hebrews 5:9). The Father sent His Son. He gave Him to us that we might be sanctified through His Spirit.

Salvation is of the Trinity. It is not alone of Jesus Christ. We must not overlook the tremendous sacrifice that the Father made in giving us His Son. What magnificent love!

Now He is willing to come and take up His abode in us that you and I become the Temple of the Holy Spirit. He comes to such wretches as you and I that He may come into our heart to sanctify us, cleanse us, and purge us from all sin. It is all to make us meet for the Master's use. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. A person cannot be complete without it. We must see the preciousness of the Trinity working out the plan of our salvation.

It was also the choosing of the Father to save us through the sanctification of the Spirit. Salvation is clearly two fold. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 says, ***“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth....”*** Again, we see the Trinity in this verse. God has saved me by ***“...the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit....”*** Therefore, it is the presence of His ***“fruit,”*** the Holy Spirit, in my life and in my heart that furnishes the unquestionable evidence of my salvation. The Holy Spirit has come for the washing and regeneration of my soul. Then I see His fruit springing up in my soul and in my life. That becomes my evidence of salvation.

Galatians 5:18-21 says, ***“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** The Lord sends His Holy Spirit into my heart to purge all those evils of the flesh from my heart.

Now let's continue reading and see the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-24: ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such there is no law. And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.”***

When the fruit of the Holy Spirit takes root in our heart, we have the evidence of faith that works through love. The fruit of the Spirit is love that yields a whole new crop of attributes. Like farming, one must first go in and clean the weeds out or they will choke out the crop. We must cultivate first. That is the preparation of the heart that the Holy Spirit does. He plows up the weeds of iniquity; He cleans them out. Then the seeding of the good crop can take place, planting new plants in our soul. They are ***“...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control.”*** There is no law against those virtues. When we bear this fruit of the Spirit, that is faith in exercise that works through love. The next verse follows so beautifully. ***“And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.”*** (Galatians 5:24) The fallow ground filled with weeds must be prepared, a seedbed readied. That seedbed is the work of the washing of regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Now there is a completely different crop, and our evidence of salvation. ***“If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk.”*** (Galatians 5:25)