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Soteriology

Lesson 1: Introduction

The doctrine of SALVATION is referred to as “soteriology. The Lord Jesus Christ is the sum, center, and theme of the Bible: the work of Jesus Christ in securing our salvation is the great co-theme.

The doctrine of salvation can be likened to a magnificently cut diamond — it is multifaceted. It may be viewed from various angles — man-ward or God-ward, each view giving a different perspective of what it means to be saved.

Failure to understand this “diamond” can lead to extreme or one-sided views of salvation. A notable example of this is the age-old “**supposed**” contradiction between Romans and James in the New Testament — GRACE and WORKS.

Romans 4:5 “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

James 2:17

“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

As can be seen, in the Book of Romans the Apostle Paul was speaking of the work of God’s grace in us — the root; James was looking at another facet of the jewel and was speaking of the work of God through us (which is the evidence of the first work!) — the fruit. The passages in Philippians and Ephesians tie the two

Philippians 2:12,13

“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you ...”

Ephesians 2:8-10

“For by grace are ye saved through faith ... Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works...”

Another example is the on-going debate known in the 5TH century A.D. as the “Augustinian-Pelagianism controversy” and, after the Protestant Reformation, as the “Calvinist-Arminian controversy.” This is a hot issue that has been generated by people rigidly viewing only one side of the jewel of God’s salvation. For this reason, each ‘side’ can always take scripture out of context to support their contention.

I caution you against forming any extreme view of the doctrine of salvation that does not take into account all the scriptures pertaining to the subject. Balance is important.

I. WHAT IS “SALVATION?”

Theologically, “Salvation designates the whole process by which man is delivered from all which would prevent his attaining the highest good that God has prepared for him.”

In reality, salvation is the actual enjoyment of that good. In this sense, our salvation is three-fold:

- **PAST** — we have enjoyed the forgiveness of sin.
- **PRESENT** — we now enjoy fellowship with God.
- **PROSPECT** — we shall enjoy eternity with God.

Men may be wrong on many matters in scripture and still get to heaven — but if they are wrong about the way of salvation, certain doom awaits them.

II. FALSE CONCEPTS OF SALVATION

Salvation has always been a cause of conflict — Matthew 10:34-36. Unscriptural ideas concerning how to be saved have existed since New Testament times, beginning with the Judaistic legalizers of the first century A.D. — Acts 15:1. An examination of all the false religions, cults, and much of today’s so-called Christian thinking shows man’s basic concept of salvation as:

- **“DO!”**

In stark contrast, the Bible clearly says:

- **“DONE!”**

This is the basic conflict.

Sinful human nature naturally seeks to earn salvation through its own merit — just as Adam and Eve attempted to cover their shame with the works of their own hands.

The false doctrine of “works salvation” appears in numerous forms, but with a single underlying aim — man must please God enough to be accepted by Him.

Two of the most prevalent false views are:

A. UNIVERSALISM:

Universalism declares “all men will be saved eventually.” This view is often expressed by statements such as, “God is too loving to send anyone to hell,” or, “all men are traveling along different roads, but are heading to the same place.”

This viewpoint is utterly false. Many scriptures affirm only one way of Salvation. For example:

John 3:3-5,7 — “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I

say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God ... Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”

John 14:6 — “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

Acts 4:12 — “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Isaiah 45:22 — “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”

God does not have one way to save Baptists, another way for Catholics, and another way for the Hindu. There is only one way any soul can be saved — by God’s grace through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. BAPTISMAL REGENERATION:

This is a sophisticated “works salvation” doctrine that keeps literally millions of sinners from ever coming to the knowledge of the truth. Baptismal regeneration (or “baptismal remission”) teaches baptism to be the means (or a means) of salvation, or to be a part of the salvation process.

It is a false doctrine practiced by Roman Catholicism and the Anglican/Episcopalian, Lutheran, and some Reformed denominations — in fact all infant-sprinkling organizations — as

well as the Campbellite (Church of Christ, Disciples, and the Christian Church) groups.

Ask these groups these questions.

“Q.—What did Baptism do to you?”

A.— Baptism removed original sin by giving me the life of grace. It made me God’s child and a member of His Church.”

(1) “Q.—Why was baptism a new birth for me?”

(2) A.—Baptism was a new birth because it gave me a share in the life of Christ.”

(2) “Q: What is baptism?”

A: Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord’s.”

“Lutherans believe that, in baptism, a person is born into the Kingdom of God and becomes an heir of salvation. It is the beginning of a life of faith...”

III. THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF SALVATION

“Many of us are not deeply convicted about the supreme importance of being saved. Our careless living and our callous indifference are the results of our placing too little significance to the salvation of sinners.

To the question, ‘Does salvation really matter?’ many seem to answer, ‘Not very much.’

Does anyone demand proof? Then go back to your church and put on an evangelistic campaign. Advertise, hold conferences, talk it up, have prayer meetings, give out lists of evangelistic possibilities, urge personal work, and see how many of your members will make any consistent effort to win any soul to Christ.

Right in the middle of your revival some of your best members will attend other events in your town more times during your revival than they will attend your services. Furthermore, many of your people will not attend one service, and such a small percent will do anything at all for the salvation of the lost that you will come away from your congregation convinced that the great majority of our people think very little of the importance of salvation.” (5)

Our salvation is supremely important because:

A. IT IS THE ONLY DELIVERANCE FROM ETERNAL DEATH:

Salvation is not some decision a person makes to align with a particular group, nor is it the subscribing to a creed. One does not become a Christian by joining a church, by natural birth, by baptism, or by the performance of good deeds — but by the personal act of “fleeing from the wrath to come” by “calling upon the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The word “salvation” implies we are saved FROM something.

B. IT IS THE ONLY GUARANTEE OF ENTRANCE INTO ETERNAL LIFE:

Salvation also means we are saved FOR something. This is the positive aspect. See: John 3:16. Salvation brings us eternal life.

C. IT IS THE ONLY PREPARATION FOR SERVICE:

See: Ephesians 2:8-10. Saved people are the only ones who can serve the Lord from the heart. God is never pleased with any other kind of service — see: Proverbs 15:8; Matthew 7:21-23.

Salvation is the first requirement for membership in a Church (baptism is the second) — Acts 2:41,47. Christians serve the Lord through His churches.

D. IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO CHANGE ONE'S LIFE:

Regeneration is a supernatural miracle. It is something only God can do. Man may enact a reformation of his ways, but only God can provide a transformation.

Jeremiah 13:23 — “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?”

II Corinthians 5:17,18a — “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he IS a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, ALL THINGS are become new. And ALL THINGS are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.”

Titus 3:3-7 — “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”