

THE SINNER'S PART IN THE SALVATION PROCESS (The Condition for Salvation)

INTRODUCTION

According to the Bible, salvation is conditioned on faith in Jesus Christ alone (John 1:12; Acts 16:31). Nearly 200 times belief in Christ is stated as the single condition for salvation in the New Testament. The Gospel of John, which was written so men could find Christ as Savior (John 20:31) uses the word "believe" over 95 times.

Faith corresponds to God's grace (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 4:4-5, 16). Since salvation is by God's grace, all a person can do to receive it is respond by faith. Faith is the absence of works and it is a gift from God (Phil. 1:29; John 6:23, 29; Acts 18:27).

Faith is the one condition all men can meet. If salvation were by education, or wealth, or intelligence, or good looks, or good works, or church membership, etc., not everybody could qualify, for these deal in the area of works. But faith is the absence of works.

Throughout the history of the church, various groups have added requirements for salvation to faith in Christ. Anything added to salvation by grace through faith is a works system and may be classified as heresy.

THE ERROR OF BELIEVE AND SURRENDER

Introduction: The question is whether one must accept the Lordship of Christ to be saved. Or put another way, can Jesus Christ be a person's Savior without being his Lord?

The Controversy: One group of Christians believe that scripture only requires belief in the person of Christ for salvation and that Lordship should logically follow with growth. This group often is accused of teaching "easy believism." Another group of Christians believe that Christ must be acknowledged first as Lord and then as Savior from sin if conversion is truly to take place. Many in this group teach that one must give up sin before he can be saved. NOTE: Often the differences between the mainstream in these two groups is one of semantics (terminology).

Key Verse: The key verse in this discussion is Romans 10:9-10, where it says that before a person can be saved he must confess that Jesus is Lord. "Lord" is a term for Christ's deity and the thought is that Jesus is the Divine-Savior (God-Man) for all those who trust Him for salvation.

The Issue: The issue before the unbeliever is the sin problem, and to be saved he must accept Jesus Christ as Savior. He must also acknowledge Him to be Lord in the sense that He is God. Jesus Christ is the Divine-Savior who alone can deliver a person from his sins. NOTE: To recognize Christ as God is to establish a relationship to Him in an objective sense. As God, Christ has a right to rule in the life.

Conclusion: Christ is Lord in an objective sense, and this Lordship or Godship must be acknowledged as such when one trusts Christ for initial salvation. However, Christ is constantly being made the Christian's Lord in a subjective sense all the days of his life. No person has ever had Christ as absolute Lord of his life in a subjective sense, but every person who is a Christian must give Christ the right to reign as Lord and King in every area of life. NOTE: Receiving Christ as Lord is not surrendering everything to him, or this would be works in salvation, it is acknowledging that He is true deity and has the right to rule in one's life.

THE ERROR OF “BELIEVE AND BE BAPTIZED”

The Controversy

There are certain groups in Christendom today that believe in some form of baptismal regeneration. There are the Campbellites and they are found identified with such groups as the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, etc. There are undoubtedly some that are saved in these groups, but their system teaches a works salvation. They have come to Christ in spite of their system. NOTE: These groups are free-willers (Arminians) in their total theology and place a great deal of emphasis upon human works to maintain salvation. NOTE: Folks who are strong on sovereign grace in salvation never become guilty of holding to baptismal regeneration.

There are some Lutherans and high Episcopalians that believe in a form of baptismal regeneration, especially among infants. Then, of course, there are the Roman Catholics who believe strongly in the sacrament of baptism as instrumental in salvation. NOTE: This is a works system and contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible that salvation is by grace through faith.

Key Verses: There are approximately six verses that baptismal regeneration proponents pounce on to prove their system. All of these can be explained and it is not good Bible scholarship to build a whole system on six verses. Due to lack of time, only three verses will be briefly dealt with.

1. Acts 2: 38: The “for” can be translated “because.” It could be read, “Repent and be baptized because (on the basis of) the remission of sins.”
2. Acts 22:16: The participle “calling” may be model and thus should be translated, “Arise, get yourself baptized, and let your sins be washed away, by calling once and for all upon the name of the Lord.” This makes calling the basis for forgiveness and baptism. This interpretation lines up well with Paul’s teaching in Rom. 10:13 where he says, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
3. Mark 16:15-16: Most scholars agree that Mark 16:9-20 are not in the better manuscripts. However even if they are inspired scripture, the context repeats the word “believe” twice, putting the emphasis in the right place. Baptism was the logical result of having believed on the person of Christ.

Conclusion: Water baptism is simply an outward symbol of an inward reality. It has nothing to do with salvation but is important in one’s testimony as a Christian. Any works system in salvation must be rejected by the Bible-believing Christian.

THE ERROR OF “BELIEVE AND REPENT”

The Controversy: These are some who believe that a person must repent in the sense of cleaning up one’s life or having an emotional experience before coming to Christ. NOTE: This would make a mockery of the Cross, because Christ came to save the unrighteous and ungodly, not those who can clean up themselves.

Conclusion: Repentance is just one phase of trusting in Christ. In fact, it is almost synonymous for faith in Christ. Repentance means “to change one’s attitude about Christ” not giving up sins or cleaning up the life before coming to Christ.

THE ERROR OF “BELIEVE AND CONFESS PUBLICLY”

The Controversy: These advocates hold that a public confession is necessary before one can be saved, for if one will not stand for Christ, he can’t be saved (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9). NOTE: Public confession as a condition of salvation would be a works system.

Conclusion: Confession is a result of having been saved, and is an evidence or proof that salvation has taken place, but it is not a condition for salvation. Nowhere is public confession required. In this connection, prayer may be helpful in clinching a decision, but it is not in itself a requirement for salvation. NOTE: Christians must also be careful about giving an altar call the wrong way. It must never be said, “Believe and come forward for salvation” or “come forward and believe” or one is subtly teaching a works system.

THE ERROR OF “BELIEVE AND JOIN THE CHURCH”

Membership in a church never saved anyone, and it is certainly not a condition for salvation. Every person who has trusted in Christ should be affiliated with a local church to demonstrate, give evidence that he has been saved.

To invite people to church to trust Christ might give one the idea that church has something to do with salvation, which it does not.

THE PRACTICALITY OF THE CONDITION OF FAITH FOR SALVATION

It helps the witness to keep the issue straight before the non-Christian. Christ is the issue and Christ alone. Until a person receives Christ there is no salvation.

It helps the witness define his terms and put no false issues before the non-Christian. The issue for initial salvation is not church membership, good works, baptism, etc., but one’s personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

It frees the witness from all gimmicks in sharing his Christ with others.