

Are You Saved?

by PAUL W. ELLINGTON

WHILE WAITING in the assembly hall of a small Midwestern college recently, I struck up a conversation with a young Protestant minister on the subject of religion. Each of us was interested in the other's viewpoint - so we talked for nearly an hour. We were thoroughly engrossed in our subject when we became aware of a young woman seated near by listening intently to our conversation. As we glanced at her, she asked, "Are you saved?"

DEFINITION OF SALVATION

What did the young lady mean by her question? Webster's dictionary gives this theological definition of "saved": "delivered from the bondage of sin and its consequences; redeemed; ransomed or liberated as from captivity or obligation; especially by the atonement of Christ."

Several shades of meaning are derived from this definition by Christian denominations:

1. Some imply salvation as being a condition of liberation from the result of sin (which is death, according to Romans 6:23). If this is all that is implied by the term "salvation," then Reorganized Latter Day Saints believe that all men are saved - regardless of the type of life they live (I Corinthians 15: 22), because future life is promised the whole human race. However, the important thing to consider is the kind of a future life it shall be.
2. Many use the terms "saved" and "converted" synonymously, thereby implying that being saved is a condition of having been converted to Christ - of having accepted him as their personal Savior. If that is what saved means, then Reorganized Latter Day Saints believe they are saved.
3. Others feel that conversion to Christ brings them into a condition of perfection in which they are incapable of committing sin again. This condition they call salvation. Reorganized Latter Day Saints do not recognize conversion as bringing about an immediate condition of perfection. They feel they are still capable of erring and committing sin. They do, however, expect that such perfection can be attained through growth under the future tutelage of Christ's personal ministry.
4. Reorganized Latter Day Saints think of the elements of salvation as including a condition of having endless life with or in the near proximity of Christ or God. It is usually thought of as being a condition of future life. They also see different degrees of salvation, dependent upon the spiritual quality achieved in this life.

THINGS THAT SAVE

Even if and when all Christians reach the same viewpoint on the definition of salvation, there lies a need of reaching agreement on the things necessary to bring about that condition. All Christians have practically the same Bible (same original source) and find practically word for word the same writings concerning salvation. Yet individual interpretations of each passage vary considerably. Probably all Christians hold the following Scriptures as containing essential truths in the concept of salvation: John 8: 31 - saved "if ye continue in my word" Acts 4: 12 - saved by the name of Christ I Corinthians 1: 21 - saved by "foolishness of preaching" I Corinthians 15: 1, 2 - saved by "gospel" II Corinthians 7: 10 - saved by "godly sorrow working repentance" II Timothy 3: 15 - saved by "holy scriptures making thee wise" Hebrews 5: 9 - saved by "obedience" James 1: 21 - saved by "engrafted word [gospel] I John 1: 7 - saved by "walking in the light"

But a number of other scriptural quotations concerning salvation are now the basis of quite divergent views among people.

Latter Day Saints believe that Hebrews 6: 1, 2 (Authorized Version) summarizes the essential beginnings of salvation: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

This Scripture points out the fundamental doctrines of Christ (faith toward God, repentance from dead works, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment) as principles upon which one must build in order to go on into perfection. Latter Day Saints feel that consistent everyday effort to live and improve Christian attitudes and actions is required to obtain the perfection spoken of in the Scripture. For those who do not obtain perfection, there is a type or degree of salvation commensurate with their spiritual achievements (I Corinthians 15: 41, 42).

HARMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES TEACHING SALVATION

Reorganized Latter Day Saints believe there is complete harmony between the teachings of Hebrews 6: 1, 2 and all other Scriptures in the Bible on the subject of salvation. And they believe it necessary to harmonize all these Scriptures if they would truthfully present their beliefs to the world for careful scrutiny. One of the legitimate charges hurled at modern Christianity has been its insistence upon taking one verse or text out of its biblical context and using it as the basis for proving a point of doctrine. Reorganized Latter Day Saints believe they can put their beliefs to the test of any and all Scriptures. They believe that if all Scriptures concerning salvation are studied in their context, they will harmonize with others studied in their context.

A CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF INSTRUCTIONS

When studying a particular Scripture, the student must relive the experience in which the statement is recorded and evaluate the counsel for use in today's world: Is the statement general and applicable to all people everywhere ? Or is it directed to a particular person in a certain situation? If particular, should it be applied generally ?

Is the statement directed to an adult or to a child ? Could it or should it apply to both? What previous instructions have been given on the subject?

In reading Scriptures, a great error is often made by failing to recognize a chronological order of happenings and instructions in any life situation. In real life we recognize it. For instance, if a hermit suddenly appeared in a community and for the first time became aware of the custom of marriage, he might ask, "What do I do to get married?" The reply to him would probably be "Why, first you must find a woman who will love you and agree to marry you!" Then he would have to be given additional instruction (as he needed it) to eventually culminate the marriage.

A similar situation was met frequently by Christ and his disciples in their real life situations with the Jews and Gentiles who made contact with Christianity for the first time. Often the question was raised: "What must I do to be saved?" And as each situation differed, so did the reply differ, depending upon the degree of understanding held by the new prospect. Notice the answer given in the following situations in response to the degree of understanding the hearer had:

1. Acts 16: 25-40 records Paul and Silas' encounter with a jailer. This being the jailer's first experience with such great Christian power, he was unlearned in the teachings of the Christ. So, in response to his question, "What must I do to be saved?" the first logical instruction to give him was "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." You will note in verses 32 and 33 that Paul

and Silas talked to the jailer and his family at greater length and culminated his talk by baptizing them. The Bible does not record the rest of the teachings of that hour, but apparently belief on the Lord Jesus Christ was explained more fully - to the extent that the jailer and his family saw the need of taking further action in their journey toward perfection.

2. Acts 2 tells of the experience of the day of Pentecost after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. On this day the disciples experienced many miraculous spiritual gifts. Many non-Christians witnessed the occasion, and in verse 37 it is recorded that many asked Peter: "What shall we do?" Peter's reply was "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Why did he not say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"? Because they already did! The spiritual experiences they had witnessed that day and the words they had heard had already convinced them of the authenticity of Jesus Christ. So it was a logical and chronological order of instructions that was given them.

OMISSIONS, NOT REPUDIATIONS

The chronological giving of instructions can be traced through all the accounts concerned with the subject of salvation. The doctrines of faith toward God, repentance from dead works, baptisms (water and Holy Spirit), laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment are all important beliefs and practices in attaining salvation and perfection. Sometimes this continuity of teaching may not seem to be recorded clearly in the Bible; but when it is studied thoroughly, its completeness will appear. The exact wording may be absent but the meaning is there. (Note the following: Mark 16: 15, 16 - repentance implied in term "gospel"; Acts 3: 19 - the word "converted" is a widely inclusive word; I Peter 3: 21 - Peter speaks to already-converted Christians; Acts 9: 17 - the account of Paul's conversion.)

FAITH VERSUS WORKS

Apparently divergent views of salvation by faith and works exist today based on the following New Testament Scriptures: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." - Ephesians 2: 8, 9. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." - Philippians 2: 12.

Today's views come from a misunderstanding of the counsel given by the church leaders to the disciples of that day. This misunderstanding again comes through the failure to take into consideration that a Scripture must be kept in its setting. One must consider to whom the counsel is directed, what its historical background is, whether it is general or particular counsel if there has been previous instruction, or more complete instruction given later in the same situation.

There really is no conflict between the views expressed in the Scriptures just quoted. Both views are correct! People are saved by faith; and people are saved by works! In fact, there are others who are saved without either.

A look at the life cycle of man will help illustrate when such conditions of salvation are possible:

(1) Jesus recognized a condition of salvation in the lives of children as he said, "of such is the kingdom of heaven." If a child fails to reach an age of accountability (age of being responsible for recognizing right from wrong) he is not condemned for the impossibility of gaining faith in Christ or accumulating works. Here is a condition in which neither faith nor works are a determining factor in salvation. A child, in death, is without sin and receives a type of salvation. (He will undoubtedly in a future life gain opportunity for a more complete salvation.)

(2) A person of accountability is held responsible for his acts. He must make a choice when presented a knowledge of Christ. He must accept or reject him and his teachings. If he accepts the Christ, he is promised remission of his sins through following the instructions given as necessary to this acceptance: (a) expressing faith in Christ; (b) being truly repentant; and (c) being baptized. This promise is recorded in Acts 2: 38, 39: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Such obedience to the instructions bring with it a condition of salvation (Mark 16: 15,16). This is salvation brought about by an expressive faith in Christ and his teachings. Through the grace of God, Christ was given to the world; through faith in Christ comes salvation.

(3) Following conversion, man still finds the necessity of making choices. He discovers himself in error and sin at times. He realizes as did the Apostle Paul: "When I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7: 21-23). So Paul and other leaders of early Christianity emphasized the necessity of developing work habits to overcome the "sin which cloth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Paul says again, "We, then, as workers together with him beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." Then he lists the important acts which keep this grace from becoming vain (II Corinthians 6: 1-10).

The Apostle Peter emphasizes: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fail; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 1: 10, 11).

A LIVE FAITH

It is to the converted Christian that the instructions to achieve salvation by works are given. For he may fall if not zealously engaged in good works. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation." - Philippians 2: 12. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.... Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." - James 2: 17, 22, 26.

It is to the unconverted prospect, or recently converted Christian looking in retrospect, that the instruction to achieve salvation by faith is given. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." - Acts 16: 31. "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." - Ephesians 2: 8.

It is to the unaccountable human (child, and probably mentally retarded adult) that Christ speaks as he recognized their salvation and freedom from sin without the expression of faith or works. "Let us go on unto perfection" is sound advice for the aggressive Christian who seeks salvation complete. This admonition recorded in Hebrews 6 challenges Christians to overcome the feeling of having arrived. Salvation is the end result of all of life lived at its best! "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." - Mark 13: 13.

* * * * *