

How Complicated is Salvation?



By Dr. Andy Woods

On his second missionary journey while in Philippi, Paul was asked the most important question that a human being can ask. The Philippian jailer inquired, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul's answer was astonishing in its simplicity. He tersely replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:30-31). Notice that there is only one verb for the lost person to fulfill before he can receive salvation: "believe." Nothing in Paul's answer resembles other conditions that are commonly inserted into modern evangelistic messages, such as baptism, church membership, walking an aisle, Godly sorrow, forsaking sins, etc...

As one begins to study this issue throughout the Bible, he or she quickly discovers that Paul's evangelistic message in Philippi was by no means an isolated case. There are probably somewhere between 150 to 200 New Testament passages which singularly condition a lost person's salvation upon belief alone in Christ. Some of the more well-known passages include John 3:16; 6:28-29; Rom 1:16; Eph 2:8-9. Belief is a synonym for faith or confidence or trust in God's provision. The moment a lost person exercises trust in Christ is the moment he is saved. End of story.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, Theologian and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, entitled this biblical phenomenon: "Belief: God's One Condition of Salvation." While it is true that multiple conditions, such as repent, submit, or obey, are required for the newly saved person to mature or grow in their newfound relationship with Christ, it remains a biblical fact that initial salvation is as simple as the one verb "believe."

Why has God made salvation so simple? Three reasons come to mind. First, God has designed salvation as a free gift (Rom 4:4). If there was some human action to be performed beyond belief then salvation becomes something that we do rather than what God does. Such a human insertion reduces salvation's free gift status by making it something we earn. Second, God has specifically designed salvation so that the principle of human boasting is eliminated (Rom 3:27; 4:2). Yet, if the unsaved could do anything to merit salvation beyond simple belief, then he has contributed to the salvation process and thus has something to boast over. God cannot allow this to happen given His aversion to pride of any sort. Third, the unsaved person is dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) and thus incapable of doing anything of spiritual value, such as obey, submit, forsake, etc... By making these other things the conditions of salvation rather than simply believing, obstacles are placed in front of the unbeliever that he or she is incapable of fulfilling. The lost are capable of doing only one thing that is pleasing to a holy God: trusting in His provision for salvation.

Let us praise God for His wisdom in keeping salvation so simple. Let us also strive to maintain the simplicity of the Gospel as we share it with others lest it be reduced to another mere human works oriented message, rather than a divine one.

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