

Back to Basics: The Gospel Plan of Salvation

We have had a number of visitors attending regularly lately, and most of these have been young people. Therefore, I think it might be prudent at this time to give a few “back to basics” lessons for the benefit of those who may be seeking the truth in knowing what must one do in order to be saved.

The Bible describes two types of people in the world.

Most people will be on the **UNSAVED** (or **LOST**) side of the line. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14,

“Enter in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leads unto life, and few are they that find it.”

Jesus was not one to mince His words when it came to telling people the truth, especially when it came to speaking of the condition of one’s soul. In these two verses alone He makes it abundantly clear that the condition of mankind is a lost one. We are told in Isaiah 59:2 that our sins have separated us from God, and that includes everybody, for Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, “ . . . **for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God. . . .**” Jesus further makes no bones about the fact that most of the world will remain forever lost and cutoff from God. *(These two verses alone, spoken by the Savior of the world, refute beyond any doubt or argument the false doctrine called Universalism, which teaches that no one will be lost. Secondly, the doctrine of Universalism cannot be sustained in the first place because in order for mankind to be saved humanity needs a Savior, and our Savior needed to be perfect, which meant He could not have sinned. Lying is a sin and Jesus, as we have seen above, said there would be few who would find the way unto eternal life. Therefore, for Universalism to be true then Jesus would have lied. If Jesus would have lied then He would not have become the perfect sacrifice in order to take away the sins of the world. If there is no perfect sacrifice then there is no Savior. And if there is no Savior then there is no eternal life for anyone, which proves Universalism to be the false doctrine it is! But I digress. . . .)*

There is much to be gleaned from these words from our Savior in Matthew 7, but one thing that seems to me to grow keener and clearer the older I get is just how much sorrow and just how much grief must have afflicted the Lord when he uttered these tragic words some two thousand years ago! Here He was (and is), the Creator and the Sustainer of the entire cosmos (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), the One Who is above all thrones, principalities and powers, the One Who is the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1:8), the beginning and the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18), the One Who is the Redeemer of all the Earth (Job 19:25; Isaiah 41:14), the One Who stretched forth the very heavens from horizon

to horizon and the One Who formed us in the womb (Isaiah 44:24), the One Who loved us so much that He left the glory and riches of Heaven to come to this lowly plain of existence and humble Himself to live His life as an unassuming servant (Philippians 2:7), the King of kings and Lord of lords, the only Potentate there is or ever will be (1 Timothy 6:15) Who suffered Himself to be beaten, and scourged, and nailed to the cross as a common criminal. This same Person had to tell us that in spite of all that He has done for us and continues to do for us, we will, for the most part as a people, continue to reject Him to our own utter destruction! I can only imagine how hard He must have fought back to keep the tears from flowing and streaming from His eyes when He spoke these words.

Yes, it is true that all have sinned, and that everyone is in dire need of salvation, but the sad truth is for us to face is the realization that one of the most difficult of all things to do is to convince a person that he or she even needs a Savior! That, to me, is the reason that most of the world will reject Jesus Christ as their Savior, and it seems the older I get while living in 21st century United States of America the harder it gets to show the people they have sin in their lives. The world about them, operating under the influence of Satan, even when they believe he does not exist, does everything in its power to teach our young that there is no such thing as sin. There is no right, there is no wrong. I take that back . . . according to the world, there is really only one thing that is wrong anymore, and that is to have morals and principles based upon a strong foundation in one's belief and confession of Jesus Christ as the true and risen and living Savior He is! Sharing God's word to a lost and dying world is wrong according to these people, but even God's word has a thing or two to say to these people:

“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isaiah 5:20-21)

It seems even among the religious community that righteousness is nothing more than an idea . . . it is no more than an ideal. Even then, one will be hard-pressed to find the religious world claiming that righteousness is even a necessity that we should strive to possess. Some of this unwillingness to lay claim to righteousness may lie in the fact that so many have any real idea, any real concept, of what is meant by true biblical righteousness, for they forget (or maybe they never even knew in the first place) that true righteousness always begins with God! It never begins with men, for righteousness belongs to God. As we are told in Romans 3:10, ***“There is none righteous, no, not one;”*** None, that is, except God!

The Lord, you see, is righteous in all of His ways, and He is also kind in all of His works (Psalm 145:17). The Lord of Heaven and of Earth is the very foundation from which righteousness springs. Our very understanding of what righteousness is comes from Him and what He says about it in His word He has

left for us in the form of the Bible. Even though it is true that mankind will be better served by being righteous that is not why God seeks for His creation to be righteous. No, He wants us to be righteous because He is righteous. He wants us to be righteous for it reflects back upon Him. That is why His Son told us in Matthew 5:16 in His sermon on the mount, ***“Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven.”***

So what does all of this mean? It means that whether or not we want to admit it, whether or not we like it or dislike it, there is a standard of right and wrong because there is a Standard Bearer we will have to stand in front of on Judgment Day and give an account of the things we have done in this body, and that Standard Bearer is the Almighty God Yahweh! We must be righteous when we meet Him or be forever lost, not through our own works, lest any should boast, but through the gift of His grace. And that dividing line between the **SAVED** and the **UNSAVED** can be called the ***“Remission of Sins,” “Forgiveness,”*** or ***“Salvation.”*** Which side of the line are you on right this very minute? Let’s see what the Bible has to say.

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:46-47)

God, we are told, **ADDS** those who are saved to the **CHURCH**. Although there is much derision taking place today (even from those who would claim to be followers of Christ) about the church and those who are members of it, one cannot claim to be saved while rejecting the church, for ***being saved*** and ***being in the church*** are the same thing. They are the same thing because they also just happen to be synonymous with ***being in Christ***, and only those who are ***in Christ*** and clothed in His holy garments will get to hear those gracious words come that mighty and glorious and terrible Judgment Day, ***“Well done, good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of your Lord”*** (Matthew 25:21).

Paul spoke about how Jesus was the Savior of the body, His body, and that Jesus Christ was Head of the church, His church, when he wrote in Ephesians 5:22-24,

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is Head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”

The church and the **BODY OF CHRIST**, the Apostle Paul tells us, are one and the same thing. As Paul says in Colossians 1:24,

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church;”

Paul also writes in Ephesians 1:22-23, saying,

“ . . . and He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.”

Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:7,

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,”

All men are under the grace of God. In Christ (i.e., His body) we have the forgiveness of sins, because of God's wondrous grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Grace is a free gift from God. However, no benefit comes from any gift unless it is accepted, opened, and used. We are not saved by grace alone, but through faith. As Paul tells us in Romans 5:15 and Romans 3:24,

“For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many. . . . being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:”

The writers of Hebrews 11:6 says,

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

Faith, you see, is required to please God. Without faith we can never be pleasing to God. Faith and believing are essentially the same thing.

Jesus said in John 3:16-18

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

We can have "***everlasting life***" if we believe in Jesus. Is it faith alone that puts us across the line of condemnation and in to the fold of salvation? Let the Bible answer.

James, the brother of the Lord, wrote in James 2:14-19

"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? *Can faith save Him?* If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also *faith by itself*, if it does not have works, *is dead*. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. *Even the demons believe – and tremble!*"

The passage in James is clear that we cannot be saved by faith alone.

Luke records in Acts 3:18-20 (RSV),

"But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that this Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled. *Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,*"

And he writes in Acts 17:30-31, saying,

"Truly, these times of ignorance *God* overlooked, but *now commands all men everywhere to repent*, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man Whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

So the word of God tells us that we are saved by grace through faith. It must be a faith that is strong enough to lead us to ***repent*** of our sins.

Jesus said in Luke 13:3, 5,

"I tell you, no; *but unless you repent you will all likewise perish*. I tell you, no; *but unless you repent you will all likewise perish*."

Repenting is like reverse in a car; we turn our lives around. We understand and are sorry that we have sinned against God. Let us look further into God's Word.

Paul wrote in Romans 10:8-11,

“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): *That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.* For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’”

Our faith must be strong enough to lead us to confess. We publicly confess our faith in order to be saved. I hope you noticed that I said we confess publicly our faith in Jesus Christ, not our sins. We do not publish our sins for all to see, but instead we are told by James in James 5:16 to confess our sins one to another, and to pray for one another, that we may be healed, as we also confess our sins before the Lord (1 John 1:9).

Look next at an actual example of confessing Jesus Christ found in the New Testament.

Acts 8:37 says,

“Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*’”

Is it confession that puts us across the line of salvation? Was the man in Acts 8 saved when he confessed? This evening we will continue our study of the Gospel plan of salvation, beginning with the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch found in Acts 8:26-39.