

END-TIMES ISSUES



#137 Is following Jesus a "realistic" option? (4)

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

A N D B E Y O N D I

1

"SALVATION WORDS" ARE "EVERYDAY WORDS" THAT HAVE BEEN GIVEN A SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE.

The SAME words that are used to describe salvation-related concepts are *also* used to describe normal everyday concepts.

↳ So we should not be surprised if the writers of Scripture use these words in ways that do not indicate salvation.

4 EXAMPLES:

- SALVATION** refers to *deliverance or rescue from something*. (In the following verse, modern translations tend to use the word "deliverance" – which is also a legitimate translation.)

For I know that this shall turn to my **salvation** through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ...
Philippians 1:19 (KJV)

... for I know that this will turn out for my **deliverance** ...
Philippians 1:19 (NASB)

2

- SAVE** refers to *being delivered or rescued from something*. (Here, they were in danger of drowning during a terrible storm... but then God told Paul that he would spare their lives.)

... we abandoned all hope of being **saved**.
Acts 27:20b (BSB)

... "Unless these men remain with the ship, you cannot be **saved**."
Acts 27:31b (BSB)

- BAPTISM** usually refers to *being immersed, dipped or washed*. It can also refer to a *ceremonial washing*.

But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first **wash** [= the word also translated as "baptize"] before the meal.
Luke 11:38 (NIV)

✓ Jesus, referring to the trials related to crucifixion: Symbolically, he would be "immersed" in them.

But I have a **baptism** to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!
Luke 12:50 (BSB)

3

- RIGHTEOUS, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND JUSTIFY** all focus on *conformity to a standard – whether God's standard or a human standard*. Because of this, the words can be used in reference to *morally right conduct*, rather than to *salvation status*. (In this sense, even *unsaved* people can be called "righteous," or be considered "justified" in what they do.)

✓ Morally right conduct done with sinful motives (i.e., trying to impress people):

Be careful not to practice your **righteousness** in front of others to be seen by them.
Matthew 6:1a (NIV)

✓ This legal expert wanted to "justify himself." Many people assume he had evil motives, but the actual text does not say either way.

But wanting to **justify** himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
Luke 10:29 (BSB)

4

We can summarize this issue ...

- When we see a "salvation word" in a passage, it does **NOT** always mean the person is saved!
 - ↳ The word can be used in other ways – activities of daily life, symbolism, etc.
 - ↳ It may also point to something that *both saved and unsaved* people can do: good "external" conduct. (For the unsaved person, it does not flow from the *changed heart* that the New Covenant provides, so it remains only an external act.)
- This is important to know!** If we fail to recognize this fact, many misunderstandings and misinterpretations can occur, when trying to understand Scripture.
 - ↳ This can even lead to false teaching and a misunderstanding of the nature of salvation.

5

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS ALSO INFLUENCES HOW WORDS ARE USED.

- Scripture has a focus on both *external conduct and internal heart issues* (attitude, motives, etc.). *Both* covenants include both concepts; but each has a different emphasis.
 - ✓ **The OLD Covenant** focuses on the need for *righteous conduct*; but it also points to the need to have a *righteous heart*, which is only available through trust in God.
 - ✓ **The NEW Covenant** focuses on the need to trust God for a *righteous heart*; but it also points to the need to have *righteous conduct* – the *result* of having a changed heart.
- OUR problem** is that we tend to confuse the two. If we see *righteous external* conduct, we often *assume* it is coming from a *righteous heart*. This results in misinterpreting reality.

6

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES ARE **NOT** PROOF OF SALVATION.

This is quite obvious, when we consider all the false religions people have invented. Each of them offers "experiences"!

↳ But sin can also occur when people are doing religious activities that God commands people to do! ↳

- A person can easily disobey God, while doing religious activities.
- ✓ King Saul made sacrifices to God, while disobeying him. Samuel had to rebuke the king (which prophets had authority to do):

Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to His voice?
Behold, **obedience is better than sacrifice**, ...

1 Samuel 15:22b (BSB)

- ✓ Isaiah 58 – describes people who seemed to be "super-spiritual" (v. 2), and they couldn't understand why God ignored everything they did. The problem is that they were ignoring a large number of obligations related to "love for neighbor."

7

In the New Testament ...

HOW do we respond, when we read a passage like this?

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age— and then have **fallen away—to be restored to repentance**, because they themselves are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to open shame.

Hebrews 6:4-6 (BSB)

- Look at the description of these people. Most people would say this "defines" *what it means to be saved!*
 - ✓ They were enlightened. (vs. 4-5)
 - ✓ They tasted the heavenly gift. (vs. 6)
 - ✓ They shared in the Holy Spirit.
 - ✓ They tasted the goodness of the word of God, and ✓ the powers of the coming age.

THEN THEY
"FELL AWAY."

8

THEY "FELL AWAY"??

... enlightened / heavenly gift / the Holy Spirit /
the word of God / the powers of the coming age...

- Can we experience all this and then fall away, unable to repent?
- **Does this mean we can lose our salvation?**

The way people respond to this is often influenced by their beliefs in other doctrinal issues. For instance ...

- It is common to look at these characteristics— which Christians do experience— and conclude that this refers to genuine Christians.
- Having assumed this, people tend to go in one of two directions:
 - ✓ If they already believe that people *can* lose their salvation, they may use this passage (interpreted this way) to "prove" it.
 - ✓ If they already believe that people *cannot* lose their salvation, they may claim that this is a "hypothetical scenario"- a situation that doesn't really exist. ("IF this could happen...")

9



What if we start with no assumptions,
but pay attention to the context?



- First of all, do these characteristics indicate that the person is saved?
 - ✓ It is obvious that these things do happen to Christians. The question is whether or not they can happen to *non*-Christians.
 - ✓ When we look at the rest of the chapter, we discover that the author of Hebrews is describing two different groups of people:
 - » One group is described in verses 4-6. They have these characteristics (vs. 4-5), but they "fall away" (v. 6).
 - » A second group, who, unlike the first group, are said to have "things that accompany salvation." He is indicating that this second group are the ones who are saved, not the first group!
- This may surprise us, since Christians *do* have the characteristics found in vs. 4-6. But what the author of Hebrews is saying is that *even unsaved church-goers* can have these characteristics.
- ✓ (Something to think about: Are the "fakes" being influenced by the "Christian environment" they are in?)

10

- Based on the context of Hebrews 6, here is what we can say about these two groups of people:
(These two groups are opposites in each of the following ways.)

The FAKES	The GENUINE
They <i>abandon</i> the characteristics in Hebrews 6:4-6.	(implied) They <i>continue</i> in the characteristics in Hebrews 6:4-6.
They <i>lack</i> the "things that accompany salvation" (vs. 9-10).	They <i>have</i> the "things that accompany salvation" (vs. 9-10, described in terms of "work" and expressions of "love").
Sluggish/lazy (v. 12).	Diligent; faith and patience (vs. 11-12 – see the verses for more details).
Like a worthless field of thorns; to be cursed and burned, if things don't change (v. 8).	Like a valuable fertile field, producing useful vegetation; blessed by God (v. 7).

11

- There is a major difference between the fakes (or "temporary believers"), and **saved** people:
 - ✓ The five items mentioned in vs. 4-5 could be described as "experiences." The people *experienced* things related to Christianity. This involves *passive* reception. It's not something we *do*; rather, it's something that *happens* to us.
 - ✓ The problem wasn't the *experience*, but the *response*. The fakes did not respond with the right "actions": the *active* expression of a *living* faith. (In this passage, this action is summarized as "work and love." It involves *active choices and commitment*.)
 - ✓ These actions are an *ongoing* commitment— described in v. 10 as helping God's people and *continuing* to help them.
 - ✓ This doesn't mean the "experiences" are meaningless, and that we should just focus on "action" and not "experience." Rather, the two *go together*. The things mentioned in vs. 4-5 are specifically the types of "experience" that provide a good foundation for having the *right* type of "actions." They are Scripture-based, not mere baseless "feelings."

12

- **WHY does the author of Hebrews include this warning?**
 - ✓ **Perhaps the #1 reason is this:** A "salvation" that lacks the *results* of salvation *isn't* a real salvation.
 - ✓ **Churches tend to contain a mixture of saved people and those who are just "church-goers."** This warning helps to make a distinction between the two groups, based on their response to it:
 - » **Those who are truly saved:** They tend to pay attention to the warning and do what is necessary to make sure that the passage never has to apply to them.
 - » **The church-going fakes:** They tend to ignore the warning or to "redefine" what it means – thus increasing the likelihood that it *will* apply to them.
 - » [Note, however, that the "Parable of the Sower" (a farmer who is planting seeds) shows us that there are *different* kinds of fakes. (See Matthew 13; Mark 4 and Luke 8.) Some fakes might not openly abandon the faith, but will simply remain *without* the results that come with salvation – the "fruit of the Spirit".]

13

- **The message of this passage *isn't* unique.** This basic concept can be found throughout Scripture (and can be expressed in different ways):
 - ✓ **James** tells us that believing the truth, without actions proceeding from that truth, is useless and dead. (See James 2:20, 26; a similar focus is in the second half of chapter 1.)
 - ✓ **Paul** talks about "the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:26); we are to "work out" our salvation, because God empowers us and gives us the desire to do so (Philippians 2:12-13); when God saves us, it is by grace, through faith, and for the purpose of doing good works (Ephesians 2:8-10).
 - ✓ **Paul** also begins his letters by teaching the people about life in Christ ("doctrine"), followed by instructions about how God's people are to live ("application").
 - ✓ **Jesus** tells us that, if we *love* him, we will *obey* him (John 14:15, 23-24).

14

A while back, we presented some verses that bother some people – verses that might seem to be related to salvation.

✧ Hebrews 6:4-6 was one of them. ✧

- **Yet we have seen that this passage *isn't* threatening genuinely saved people** with the possibility of permanently losing their salvation.
 - ✓ Instead, when taken in context, it warns us that even *fakes* can have "Christian experiences."
 - ✓ The difference is that *saved people* will express their salvation through their "work and love"; whereas the *fakes* won't.
 - ✓ The *fakes* are the ones who are in danger of abandoning the faith... and becoming so hardened against it, that they are not capable of returning to it.
- **How should people respond to this passage?** If you aren't sure if you're about to "fall away," then *do something about it!* Return your focus to Jesus; and (if applicable) "start over" following him. Don't just say "It's too late," and quit!

15

What about some of those other passages that were listed?

- **Most of them can be easily resolved** by just paying attention to the context, not making assumptions, etc.
 - ✓ What we learned about the Hebrews passage can also help – the fact that fakes can have some of the same *experiences* that saved people have... but they don't have the *life-expressions* that are a part of genuine salvation.
 - ✓ When examining a passage, it doesn't hurt to see what *other* passages say. But we need to be careful that we don't use those other passages to *change* what the passage in question actually says. (Even false teachers can claim they're "using Scripture to interpret Scripture." They might not know it, but they're actually using Scripture to *attack* Scripture and to *change* what it says.)
- **It's OK if we don't know all the answers.** We can trust the God who *does* know all the answers!

16

- **Several of the passages that were listed have a similar theme:** There are people who *look* like Christians, but who later abandon the faith. We would hope that *some* of them would return to the truth; but in most cases, it's simply a matter that they were never saved in the first place.

They went out from us, but they did not belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But their departure made it clear that none of them belonged to us.

1 John 2:19 (BSB)

Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas send you greetings.

... **Demas**, in his love of this world, has **deserted** me ...

Colossians 4:14; 2 Ti 4:10a (BSB)

- ✓ From what little we know about Demas, he appears to fit in this category. He first helped Paul; but later returned to the world.

17

If indeed they have **escaped the corruption of the world** through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, only to be **entangled and overcome by it again**, their final condition is worse than it was at first. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to turn away from the holy commandment passed on to them.

Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

2 Peter 2:20-22 (BSB)

- ✓ This passage describes people who originally looked saved. Yet they not only *abandoned* the truth, but also tried to get others to join them. (They became false teachers.) Peter tells us that they were simply returning to their *actual* (original) nature.

These are *examples*, showing how passages that first appear to be difficult may make sense, after further examination. There is no need to panic, when we first don't understand a verse!

18

If we deliberately go on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins remains, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume all adversaries.

Hebrews 10:26-27 (BSB)

- ✓ This is a warning: If we *deliberately* go on sinning, after being exposed to the truth, we may become so hardened against the truth, that there will be nothing to look forward to in the future ... except for a horrible judgment.

... but the one who **stands firm** to the end will be **saved**.

Matthew 24:13 (NIV)

- ✓ This verse is part of the description of the horrible times during the "last days." During this time, many will go after the teachings of false prophets. But only those who remain faithful to Jesus – who "stand firm" – will be saved.

19

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have **fallen away from grace**.

Galatians 5:4 (NIV)

- ✓ "Falling away from grace" does *not* mean they were going to "lose their salvation"! In the context of Galatians, these people were already saved by grace; they had already "begun in the Spirit" (Galatians 3:3). But false teachers were teaching them that they had to rely on *human effort* to **grow** in salvation. This verse is part of what Paul said, when showing them the *logical inconsistency* of that false teaching. (The *same* grace that *justifies* us also *grows* us.)
 - » Because they were saved, they would take heed to Paul's rebuke and would repent. They would abandon the false teaching.
 - » The fakes in the group (if there were any) would ignore Paul and continue to follow the false teachers. We could say that these people (the fakes) "fell away from grace"; but in reality, they were never saved in the first place – which is what we learned in the Hebrews 6 passage. They walked away from the grace that could have saved them.

20

HOW should we respond to all this?

- Some things in Scripture may be difficult to understand, because of our own limitations.
- But what we *need* to know, in order to be saved and to live a godly life, *can* be understood, *if* we are willing to accept what Scripture says, and rely on the Spirit to empower us.



- It's a *growing process*. It takes time. But if we are willing to take the time, *God will get us to where we need to be*.

But **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:18a (BSB)

21

OUR MISSION!

GROW!

We **CAN** follow Jesus, *if we are willing!*
HE makes it possible!

- ✚ **Never stop pursuing a better understanding of his Word, ✚**
along with a better life-application of what we understand!

22

Credits

SCRIPTURE

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