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Salvation in Jesus or in Theology.

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Learn the Bible at Home

Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Salvation in Jesus or in Theology.

Topics.

- Two different views of salvation.
- Are we saved by a set of doctrines or by knowing Christ?
- The purpose of knowledge.

This message is about answering the following question, "Is the security of our salvation based on the reality of a real man named Jesus who walked on this earth or is our salvation based on holding fast to a set of doctrines and theology?" Before beginning this journey, I would like to say that "No single message tells the whole story." I say that because I don't want anyone reading this message to get the idea that I am saying a correct understanding of the Bible is not of great value. Obviously, I believe a proper understanding the Bible is a great blessing, but that is not what this message is about or focused upon. Neither is this message about which foundational truths concerning Christ, the Gospel and God's grace we should be prepared to stand up for and defend nor is it about the many other Scriptural teachings from Genesis to Revelation that we personally believe that would be better clothed with grace rather than allowing them to divide us.

THE REASON FOR THIS MESSAGE

I was having a friendly conversation with a woman who I knew had been a faithful dedicated and committed sister in Christ for over twenty-years. After some time, the conversation turned to questioning a particular doctrine that she believed (at that time) the conversation progressed to a certain point and then she suddenly stopped it. In a fearful and insecure tone, she said "That is enough, don't tell me anymore." Her sudden reaction surprised me. I wondered why she felt so threatened. I knew she was passionate, dedicated and committed to her faith and I had no-doubt that she was saved. Since that moment I took particular notice of the reaction of different brothers and sisters in Christ when a particular doctrine they believed was questioned and quickly came to realise my friend's fearful reaction to stop the conversation or steer it in a different direction was a common reaction in certain Christian groups. I found that many Christians I talked to feared questioning doctrines or considering that something they may have been taught might be wrong, "Why I wondered? It made no sense surely if what we believe is true there should be no fear in questioning it because it will prove itself to be true and if it doesn't then it is a good thing that we questioned it. The most likely answer to this fear of questioning what we believe probably stems from the fear that if one part of what we believe is wrong our entire salvation will fall apart, but is it reasonable or even right for us to think this way?

FOLLOWING ARE TWO DIFFERENT VIEWS OF SALVATION

1. Salvation is dependent on a certain set of doctrines being correct as long as a believer holds fast to each of these doctrines they are saved. In this view salvation is dependent on having every doctrine (these will vary according to what church a person is in) exactly right
2. Salvation is in trusting in the reality of a real person named Jesus and not in holding fast to a set of doctrines. Those in this second group view their salvation in the same way they view a natural friendship. Hopefully the following will help explain this view, I have a friend, who I know reasonably well, but I don't know him as well as his wife does,

compared to her I have a very limited knowledge of him, but even on that limited knowledge I still have a friendly and personal relationship with him. No-doubt as my fellowship with him grows I will learn more about him, I may even realise some perceptions I had about him were wrong, but does that mean I did not have a close friendship with him prior to discovering these things, of course not, it simply means I will know him even more as we grow in friendship together. Christians in the second group see their salvation in this same light, their salvation is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, they know they don't understand everything, but they are secure in their faith because they know Christ and faithfully walk with him.

This leads to the following two questions:

1. Are we saved by theology and doctrine or by knowing Christ?
2. How much knowledge does a person need to be saved?

Before we start searching for the answer to these two questions consider the following; during the New Testament era when Jesus was alive on earth many people simply saw him and the miracles he did and recognised he was the Son of God, repented, believed got baptised and were saved (they had very little knowledge, but they had enough to know that they were sinners before God and that Jesus was the Son of God and Saviour). Remember during the early church no-one had the Canon of the Bible as we have it today. John tells us Jesus miracles were to prove Jesus was the Christ. The Gentiles would have had practically no knowledge of the Old Testament and it is certain many only heard Jesus speak one or two messages as he passed through yet when they saw Jesus miracles and heard him speak, they believed in him, were baptised and saved.

They then gathered together (mostly in their own homes) to learn more about Christ and his teachings. The primary purpose of Scriptural knowledge is to prove Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world. The Scriptures are written to lead the reader to the Lord Jesus Christ, and once they know the Lord and believe in him the Scriptures have achieved their primary purpose. All Christians begin as spiritual infants in Christ, just as any human baby grows in relationship with their parents and family in knowledge, intimacy and right behaviour so also should spiritual infants grow in Christ and in his family.

If salvation is viewed as a growing relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, we would all be more loving toward others who have faith in Jesus, rather than argue about what we believe, we would understand that each one of us is on a spiritual journey with Christ and simply manifest our faith through love and grace knowing that we all have the same heartfelt end goal in sight which is to glorify Christ honour his heavenly Father and be gathered together with the Lord when he returns.

One of the greatest difficulties Paul had to deal with in the churches he had started, was the fact that many of those in his assemblies (especially the Jews) believed salvation was in having every doctrine perfectly interpreted, adhering to ceremonial rites and holy days and keeping religious customs and traditions rather than living by faith in a spiritual devoted relationship of love with a real person named the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul said:

- Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. ¹⁶But avoid irreverent nit picking (vain babblings KJV) for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness (2 Tim. 2:14-16).

Since this verse has been misunderstood by some it should be mentioned here that the context and focus of Paul's words, "Rightly handling the word of truth" is primarily upon right and wrong behaviour and our responses to others when we are speaking about what we believe.

During the time of the early church, Jews and Gentiles were joining the same church (in their homes at that time). Jews who had been indoctrinated in Moses Law for the last four-thousand years were joining together with Gentiles who not only had no knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but also had most likely worshipped pagan gods most of their life. Their churches would have been filled with people of all sorts of different religious perspectives, theories and ideas concerning, the Scriptures, but the one thing they all had in common was that they believed in the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ and desired to follow him. It is certain that Paul with his enormous knowledge and wisdom understood that there would be a great mixture of minds amongst the brothers and sisters in Christ in his congregation concerning the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that had newly come into the world and for this reason is telling Timothy to teach the word of truth (referring to the message of the cross and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ) without getting into quarrels and arguments, strife and divisions.

In the context of these verses rightly handling the word of truth means that we should always teach and share our faith in a spirit of love, patience, gentleness, kindness and grace in contrast to arguing and quarrelling, it is about showing grace. This is because manifesting the fruits of the Spirit in our conversations is of more value to God than arguing and quarrelling in the attempt to prove we are right. This is because manifesting God's Spirit of love and grace amongst our fellowship and in our witnessing does far more to endear someone toward God and toward us than any amount of arguing and quarrelling ever will.

THE FOLLOWING IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THIS PRINCIPLE

Years ago, as a very young Christian while taking a smoko break on a building site I observed two Christians having a heated argument over different aspects of the Bible in front of the unsaved men that we worked with. I remember thinking "It does not matter which of them is right they have totally destroyed God's name by their aggressive arguing and quarrelling." By their lack of grace and love toward each other and their outward actions and behaviour they simply confirmed to those who we worked with that they are better to stay clear of Christianity since all they witnessed was two hostile men who claimed to be in the faith. In contrast to this I knew another lovely Christian lady who when witnessing was rudely told she was naïve to believe the Bible, she had brilliant knowledge and could have argued the point or put the man in his place, but she chose to manifest her faith by showing grace and responded to him kindly, this woman rightly handled the word of truth by responding in humility rather than argue or degrade this aggressive man who considered himself superior to protect her own pride and ego. Paul told Timothy:

- The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil and correcting their opponents with gentleness so that God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Paul in this verse is basically saying that the heart attitude of a brother and sister in Christ should always be hoping that whoever they come in contact with might be saved and from this deep desire be motivated to always respond in kindness and goodness regardless of what the other person believes or how they treat them. This means if a person responds to us with aggression it does not give us the right to respond back to them in the same manner.

Paul told Titus:

- To teach what accords with sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).

In the context of this chapter sound doctrine refers to teachings regarding right behaviour it embraces teachings concerning:

- Dignity, being sober-minded and sound in the faith.
- Being patient in love, reverent in behaviour and not slandering anyone.
- Training the young and loving husbands and wives.
- Being self-controlled, kind and not being a slave to alcohol.

Paul told the Roman brothers and sister:

- To watch out for and avoid those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that they had been taught (Rom. 16:17).

Throughout the book of Romans, the only doctrines Paul tells those at Rome to separate from are doctrines that:

- Lead a person away from Christ.
- Entice those in Christ away from grace and back under the law to be saved.
- Teach that Jews and Gentiles are two separate nations in Christ.
- Lead a believer toward ungodly behaviour.

Paul makes it very clear that should any teacher or brother and sister in Christ teach doctrines that lead people away from the Lord, away from grace and teach contrary to the truth that God is creating in Christ one new man in Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles (also called one nation in Christ, a new creation in Christ, the church and the body of Christ) or teaches any doctrine that leads to ungodly behaviour they should be avoided. Now if what I have just said is true how then should brothers and sisters who have differing opinions fellowship together without quarrelling arguing and dividing? Consider the following for a moment, God said to Israel:

- Come now, and let us reason together (Isaiah 1:18).

Perhaps a good place for us to start would be to lay the strongholds of our minds aside so that we can do what God invited Israel to do with Him and reason together in a spirit of spiritual adventure in contrast to fear and in an atmosphere of peace and grace in contrast to aggressive argument. God does not count it a sin to question our teachers, question what have been taught or question years of tradition in fact in the book of Acts we are told Paul (accompanied by Silas) went into a Jewish synagogue in Berea and after teaching the Scriptures the author of Acts says that the Jews in that synagogue:

- Were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if what they had been taught by Paul was actually so (Acts 17:11)

How amazing is this these Jews after hearing Paul (the author of most of the New Testament) go home and not only question what he had taught them, but study the Scriptures to see if what he was saying was true and they are commended for it. Sadly in many churches today if a member of the congregation got a group from the church together in their home to question what their minister, teacher or preacher had taught that morning that brother or sister would be called up before the elders to be disciplined and told that if they are going to hold such meetings its best they leave the church. This idea is contrary to the early church, they would no-doubt with great excitement go home and question what they had been taught. Added to this the teacher would join them in a in a spirit of humbleness (not superiority) to see if there was any truth in what the brother or sister

was questioning. In this way everyone was entering the fellowship and contributing to each other's spiritual growth. Added to this it limited the spread of false teaching since everyone was invited to test the teaching of each other in contrast to exalting and trusting in one man. Even brothers and sisters in a natural family that is held together by love do not agree with each other on every matter, but there is no doubt they would do what they can to keep the family together. Ever wondered why this is? Simply this it is common love that cements the family together and this bond of love overrides their differences. The church is the body of Christ, we are his brothers and sisters saved by grace and adopted children of God. This means whoever is in Christ is in God's global and worldwide family.

CONSIDER FOR A MOMENT

God's family of which Christ is the head is global it is spread amongst different nations cultures, languages throughout the world, everyone in Christ's family has different levels of education (especially religious) past baggage, some have deep emotional hurts, others have been raised in privileged and wealthy families, while others are from abusive situations and families of lowly positions. Added to all these differences many who come into God's global family enter it with a mindful of all kinds of religious ideas that they have inherited from their childhood while others have had none at all. Some have been in the Christian faith for years while others are newly born into it and amongst its members are children, teenagers, adults and retired men and woman.

Once a brother or sister in Christ takes some time to ponder these facts and lifts their vision from the church being only the local church they attend to seeing that Christ's church is global and functioning in multitudes of nations worldwide it becomes clear that it is foolish to think that we are all going to agree on every doctrine of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. So, what should we do some might ask? That answer is not simple since there are a multitude of things to consider, but a starting point would be to allow God's grace to cover our errors in theology with the understanding that we are all spiritually growing both in godly behaviour and in Scriptural knowledge and will be continually growing in both until the Lord returns. Following are three major hindrances to Christ's family growing together in this type of grace, love and fellowship:

- Pride and ego.
- Legalistic and dogmatic teaching.
- Hypocritical prideful ministers who are in the ministry not to serve Christ in humbleness, but for their own selfish ambition and to expand their own religious empire because they love power and worldly riches and the importance and exaltation they receive from their followers.

CONSIDER THIS FOR A MOMENT

If the leaders of a church taught their followers that once they are in Christ they are saved, not by their knowledge (though that has shown them the way to salvation) but by their faith in Christ and God's grace everything else they learn is added valued and though it will strengthen their faith and give them a far clearer understanding of Christ the Lord they love it will not make them more saved since their salvation is complete in Christ. Under this type of teaching no-one would fear questioning all those teachings outside the message of the cross and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus asked the twelve apostles:

- Do you want to leave me; Peter answered him saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68).

This means that if anyone believes the words Jesus spoke, they can be saved to eternal life or to put it more simply if anyone reads the red print in most Bibles, they have enough information to be saved to eternal life since these are the words of Christ and the words of eternal life. This why Paul's entire focus was upon Christ and proclaiming him. Paul wrote:

- To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8-10).

Some Christian groups believe the Christian faith is all about intellectual knowledge they feel it is wrong to embrace emotion or to allow feelings especially in Christian worship, but the following words of Paul shine a spotlight on the truth that there is a love that surpasses knowledge. Paul bowed his knees before God and prayed:

- That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17-21).

Paul says he was called to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ and prays that everyone who belongs to Christ would be filled with the fullness of God, he is praying that every brother and sister would experience God's fullness in their hearts and mind that surpasses the glory of knowledge. The only way to experience God's fullness is by knowing Christ's love in our hearts and love produces emotions and feelings, the Christian faith is certainly not based on emotion, but it will produce emotions of tremendous joy and praise.

SALVATION IS ABOUT KNOWING CHRIST

Even though I may have certain knowledge about a close friend who is kind and compassionate incorrect and may not know everything about them that lack of knowledge does not affect my friendship toward them since I know enough about them to know that they are kind, compassionate and would go out of their way to help me. This same principle applies to my relationship with Jesus I know that:

- God exists and Jesus is His Son.
- Before God I am a sinner.
- Jesus died for my sin and rose again.
- I cannot be saved by self-effort or adhering to ceremonial rites, holy days and keeping religious customs and traditions etc.
- I need to repent and accept Jesus the Son of God as my Saviour.
- The faithful who have died in Christ will be raised to eternal glory.
- Jesus will return again in glory to gather those who belong to him to eternal life and everlasting glory.

This is all many new converts know when they surrender their lives and hearts to Christ and are saved. Most in the Christian faith began their spiritual walk with only enough knowledge to know Christ's love and God's grace and to get them saved to eternal life. Everyone in God's Kingdom begins as a spiritual infant and from the love of God in their hearts and minds they endure persecutions and hardships and will continue to grow in godly behaviour, wisdom and knowledge until Christ returns. Traditional Christianity has presented salvation as a solid brick wall made up of many individual bricks (the bricks being the doctrines of the church), providing these bricks remain firmly fixed in their proper place a believer's salvation is secure, but should one of the bricks be proven to be faulty

their salvation is in danger of collapsing. When salvation is viewed this way there will always be fear when the doctrines making up this brick wall of salvation are brought into question since the security of salvation for those who have this type of mindset is upon a certain set of doctrines, they are holding fast to being one-hundred percent correct. A better perspective is to view salvation as a trampoline, where the canvas is Christ and the doctrines are the many springs that hold the canvas in place. Anyone of these springs can be taken out and examined without the canvas collapsing. We may even take a spring out and replace it with a new one and the canvas still does not collapse.

This is how salvation should be viewed we are saved by Jesus (symbolised by the canvas). The faith that saves us is not faith in doctrines, but faith in the Son of God. It is Jesus who saves us not a head full of intellectual knowledge. The purpose of the knowledge is to lead us to Christ the Saviour. It should always be kept in mind that not every teaching of the Bible is necessary to know for a sinner to be saved to eternal life. Jesus said:

- God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

These glorious words of Jesus clearly show we are saved by believing in God's Son not doctrines and intellectual head knowledge. The purpose of the Scriptures is to convict us of sin and to reveal Christ. Jesus said to the religious leaders (the chief priest's Pharisees and scribes) of his generation:

- You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me (John 5:39).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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