

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Salvation in Biblical Baptism

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (1 Peter 3:18–22, KJV 1900)

The Incarnation, God becoming man and living and dying as a man, poses a major challenge to our understanding. However, we cannot understand any of the major doctrines of the New Testament apart from that bedrock truth. If a person gets this doctrine wrong, they typically get many other doctrines wrong as well. Occasionally sincere believers become confused and convince themselves that water baptism is an essential ingredient for eternal salvation. Obviously, if this idea is true, the actual number of people who shall enjoy eternity with God shall be a minuscule fragment of humanity. Scripture describes the number of those who shall spend eternity in glory with their God and Savior as a large number, not a small one. (Revelation 5:9) Broken, frail humans tend to chase extreme ideas rather than the simple and clear truths of God. On one extreme view of the number of people whom the Lord shall save eternally you have these folks who reject that anyone who dies without water baptism can possibly see God in glory, and the same folks usually teach that many who were so baptized shall also fail to see God in peace and glory. The consequences of this doctrinal belief end up with likely a number less than one percent of humanity. And then you have a very few folks who reject the Biblical reality of election, and of eternal punishment altogether and believe that God shall in the end save all of humanity. No greater contrast could be imagined; these errant ideas present the nearest you could imagine to an "all-or-nothing" belief in the number saved eternally.

Peter could not make the point more clearly than he does in this passage. Jesus' sufferings bring us to God, the just for the unjust, not our water baptism. To further emphasize his point, Peter wholly attributes salvation to water baptism, but that salvation is not eternal salvation, but it is a "now" salvation. "...baptism doth also **now** save us." Peter adds still more clarity by the words, "...not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God." The "now salvation" that Peter attributes to Biblical baptism in

water does not wash away our sins and secure our eternal inheritance. It rather "now" answers a good conscience toward God. The Lord commands it, and the only way we can find peace of conscience for the conviction to honor our Lord and His death and resurrection for our sins is through the act of baptism.

The Bible uses the various forms of "save" in many different ways. Any effort to homogenize the word and force—actually, wrest, twist out of joint—it to only one meaning where ever it appears in Scripture always results in utter confusion on the question of salvation, as well as many other essential Bible doctrines. The word without any qualification by context is wholly generic. It implies some form of danger, along with some kind of deliverance to safety from that danger. Thus, if we hope to gain any clarity in understanding the Bible's teachings on this major theme, we must examine each appearance of the word in its Biblical context and ask the logical, obvious question, "Saved from what?" "Saved to what?" The Bible teaches many salvations, not one.

It is impossible to wrest all the appearances of this word into one doctrine or one meaning. If we examine Matthew 1:21, we see that Jesus came into the world—from His birth—to save His people from their sins, not to merely make their salvation possible if they would contribute their effort to His to complete the salvation.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12 KJVP)

This verse affirms salvation only in the name, the exclusive person of the Lord Jesus Christ and no other. How then do we reconcile this clear and indisputable Biblical truth with such verses as the one below?

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both

save thyself, and them that hear thee. (1 Timothy 4:16 KJVP)

In this verse, Timothy is not only potentially able to save himself, but also those who hear him; by implication, believing and obeying his preaching. So if we wrest the doctrine of salvation into one idea and one Savior, how do we reconcile the two classes of passages? Is Jesus the only name by which we are saved? Does He truly save His people from their sins, or does He not? Does Timothy actually save himself and possibly his hearers, or does he not? If we accept both passages as true in their assertions (How can we do otherwise?), we now have both Jesus and Timothy as our saviors. We face the grim reality that those passages that assert that Jesus alone is our exclusive Savior are not entirely true. These observations barely touch the inconsistency and confusion that results from such thinking.

What is the solution to the dilemma? How do we reconcile the two classes of passages so that they harmonize instead of contradict each other? How do we affirm that water baptism actually does save us, but that the salvation that it accomplishes is a salvation other than the salvation that puts away the filth of our sinful flesh?

The answer is actually far simpler than those who reject the Biblical concept of multiple salvations, each defined by the context of the word. In terms of our eternal salvation, Jesus alone can and does save us from our sins. We add nothing to His work. We contribute nothing to ensure the salvation outcome. Nothing at all. However, in terms of the “now” salvation of which Peter writes in our study passage, we may be ever so sincere and labor ever so diligently in our walk of faith, but we shall never fully experience the salvation of which Peter writes, the answer of a good conscience, unless and until we are baptized in a New Testament manner.

God never designed multiple ways of eternal salvation, a common belief that many contemporary Christians embrace. He designed one and only one way for our eternal salvation, and that one and only one way is wholly sufficient to accomplish its objective for every person chosen to that eternal salvation in the love of God. A thorough study of the Scriptures will affirm that the Bible teaches us of one and only one eternal salvation, and all of that eternal salvation is accomplished by the grace of God through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Isaiah 53:10-11; read these verses in the context of the whole chapter. Notice the frequency in this chapter of the idea that this suffering Messiah intervenes and suffers on our behalf and in such a way that we shall not face that suffering ourselves) Further Scripture teaches that children of God experience many deliverances in this life, and the experience involves both the Lord’s kind grace and guiding hand, as well as the believer’s

active faith and obedience. Peter teaches us about one such salvation in our study passage.

While we experience the new birth in time, the ultimate outcome of God’s grace that accomplishes and secures our eternal inheritance through God’s—and our—Surety, the full realization of that salvation shall not be experienced or known until the Second Coming, after time has ended and eternity begun. Therefore, it is both technically correct and Biblical to refer to this work of God as our “Eternal salvation.”

And since we fully experience the many present deliverances or salvations associated with both God’s kind providence and with our faith—and our faith-walk—in time, and since the consequences of those deliverances are wholly restricted to time, it is altogether accurate and appropriate that we refer to these deliverances in ways similar to Peter’s reference to baptism in our study passage, “now” salvation, or “Time salvation.”

The Biblical concepts associated with these two terms, both of them Biblical terms, do not represent different positions on one “Salvation continuum.” Nor do they represent two “Phases” of one salvation. They each define unique deliverances. The distinction between our eternal salvation in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and our various temporal deliverances that Scripture associates with both the Lord’s kind providence and our faithful faith walk, requires that we view them as wholly distinct doctrines, as well as distinct experiences in the life of the child of God.

Are these two terms Biblical terms? Yes, they are. Peter uses the grammatical equivalent of time in the adverb “now” relating to our “now” salvation in water baptism, a salvation that does not put away the filth of our sinful nature and conduct. And Paul specifically uses “eternal salvation” to refer to the work that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished as God’s—and our—Great High Priest.

*And being made perfect, he became the author of **eternal salvation** unto all them that obey him.* (Hebrews 5:9 KJVP)

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25 KJVP)

Obedience in Hebrews 5:9 relates to what God does in us in the work of the new birth, not to our active obedience as His believing disciples. We obey Him in the new birth in the same way that Lazarus obeyed Him and arose from the dead (John 11:43-44); the same way that the winds and the seas obeyed Him. (Matthew 8:27; Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25) We obey Him in our discipleship, in our “now salvation” or our time salvation in acts of conscious, willing, voluntary faith and obedience, wholly different from the process by which he accomplishes our eternal salvation.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor