

THE SINNER'S PART IN SALVATION (Repentance and Faith)

INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in salvation. To deny God's sovereignty is to deny God and to deny man's responsibility (freewill) is fatalism. This is a mystery or an antinomy. NOTE: Salvation is all of God, but a person is not saved until he trusts in Jesus Christ by an act of his own will. To deny that the Bible stresses God's sovereignty over man's response or man's response over God's sovereignty is to pervert the gospel.

The Bible teaches that salvation is open to any man who sincerely wants it. Christ presented Himself to all without distinction to the end that they might entrust themselves to him for salvation. NOTE: The gospel offer is not limited to the elect. There is a universal offer of Christ to all men and men are held responsible to believe it (Acts 17:30).

From the human aspect of salvation, a man must exercise faith and repentance and experience conversion before he can be saved. Without faith and repentance no person will be saved and his destiny is the lake of fire. NOTE: Man's eternal destiny depends on a positive response of faith in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:12; 3:16; 3:36; Rom.: 10:13; Acts 16:31).

FAITH

Meaning. Faith means to be persuaded of, and hence to place confidence in, to trust and signifies reliance upon. Saving faith is not mere intellectual assent to facts, but it involves a commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. NOTE: It is possible to have an intellectual belief in Christ and not really be committed to Him for salvation (cf. John 2:23-25).

Descriptions

1. Receiving (John 1:12): Receiving means to welcome and speaks of the sinner heartily welcoming Christ into his life as personal Lord and Savior.
2. Calling (Rom. 10:13): This means that the sinner in great need summons or calls the Lord Jesus to save him from his sins.
3. Obeying (1 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:17): The sinner obeys the command to believe in Christ for salvation (Acts 16: 31).
4. Coming (Matt. 11:28; John 6:37): Coming speaks of a voluntary effort of the sinner in bringing himself to Christ for cleansing from sin.
5. Drinking and Eating (John 4:14; 6:54): This speaks of assimilating Christ into one's life.

Activity

Man is passive in the specific call of God to salvation, but is actively involved when saving faith is exercised. Man, by an act of his will, responds positively to the person and work of Christ.

The specific call of God must result in an appropriate response by the person called to salvation. It is God who calls but it is not God who answers the call; it is the person to whom the call is addressed.

Response and the Whole Man:

1. Introduction. What are we asking a man to do when we invite him to receive Christ? We are asking him to believe with his whole personality—will, intellect and sensibility (emotion). Saving faith includes three elements: knowledge, belief and trust.
2. Knowledge (Rom. 10:14, 17): It is impossible to be saved apart from an adequate knowledge of the person and work of Christ. Faith cannot begin in a vacuum of knowledge. A person cannot trust Christ if he knows nothing about Him. Knowledge involves the intellect. A person may be convinced of the facts about Christ, resulting in profession, but not possession of Christ.
3. Belief (Acts 16:31; John 3:16; Rom. 10:13; Eph. 2:8-9): It is not enough to know the facts of salvation, but the facts must be believed. There is to be a sense of need and the applying of the facts to one's experience. Belief involves the emotions. NOTE: A person may have facts and commitment to some nebulous concept of God and not have personal involvement with Christ.
4. Trust (Luke 14:25-35; Mark 8: 34-38): Inherent within the word believe is the idea of commitment. Faith is knowledge passing into conviction, and it is conviction passing into confidence. Faith cannot stop short of self-commitment to Christ, that is, a transference of reliance upon Christ alone for salvation. Trust involves the will. NOTE: It is possible to have knowledge and a religious experience, but if there is not commitment to Christ there is no salvation.

Gift of Grace: While the act of faith in Christ is something which every individual is held responsible to do if salvation is to occur (John 3:16), it is also a true fact that faith is a gift from God (Phil. 1:29; Acts 18:27; John 6:28-29). NOTE: This is a mystery involving the problem of the infinite and the finite, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and it is inscrutable to the human mind.

REPENTANCE

Meaning: Repentance is a change of attitude or mind that may or may not result in godly sorrow. NOTE: Repentance is not some super-emotional experience with tears and sorrow. Some personalities are more emotional than others and their conversion may be emotional, but repentance means to change the mind.

Nature

1. Repentance is towards God (Acts 20:21).

2. Repentance is towards Christ (Acts 2:37-38). Peter preached that men were to change their mind about Christ.
3. Repentance is towards sin (Acts 26:20). Repentance is a feeling of wrongness about sin and a desire to turn from it.

Illustration: The Thessalonians turned from idols (negative) to serve the living God (positive) when they believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 1:9).

Relationship of Faith to Repentance: Which comes first, faith or repentance? These concepts are not the same but they can never be separated. The faith that is unto salvation is a penitent faith and the repentance that is unto life is a believing repentance. The interdependence of faith and repentance can be readily seen when we remember that faith is faith in Christ for salvation from sin.

Illustration: A person may be traveling to Kampala from Nairobi. About halfway there he decides (repentance) to come back. Then he turns the car around (conversion) and moves in a new direction (faith).

Gift of Grace: If a man repents, it is because God has granted the grace for that person to do it (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). Again this is a mystery and inscrutable.

PRACTICALITY OF THE SINNER'S PART IN SALVATION

The gospel should always be given with an appeal to the person's will, for man must respond before salvation takes place.

An effective witness seeks to get the facts of the gospel before men and to bring them to a decision about Christ.