

Lesson 8: Saving Belief

- I. In our last Lesson, we compared the Bible teaching on salvation to the three most commonly held views among those who associate themselves with Christianity today
 - A. From that study, we concluded that Salvation is available to all who
 1. Are taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 2. Believe in Him as the Son of God who saved us through His death, burial and resurrection
 3. Repent of a sinful life by a change in heart to follow after a Holy God
 4. Confess their belief in Jesus as our Savior who is the Son of God
 5. And are Baptized by immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins
 - B. In this Lesson, we would like to look at the nature of a saving belief
 - C. It is this concept that has led some to teach that salvation is obtained by belief only without the need for baptism

- II. To be objective and honest in our study of the Bible, we must acknowledge the existence of many other New Testament Scriptures that mention salvation with belief but make no reference to repentance, confession and/or baptism
 - A. As examples, consider the following passages:
 1. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."
 2. John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
 3. John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."
 4. John 6:40, "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."
 5. John 6:47, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life."
 6. Acts 10:43, "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."
 7. I John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."
 - B. Do these passages teach that salvation is obtained by belief only without the need for repentance, confession and baptism?
 1. If so, we would seem to have encountered a conflict or contradiction among Scriptures.
 - a. From the ministries of Jesus and the Apostles, we have identified specific passages that say belief, repentance, confession and water immersion are all required for salvation
 - b. And yet the examples just cited are verses that speak of eternal life for believers without mentioning any other conditions.

2. From the sound learning principles governing Bible study, we know verses do not conflict with one another since all Scripture is inspired by God
 3. That means, we must look for a consistent interpretation that acknowledges the truthfulness of all these passages.
- C. Since the issue seems to hinge on the difference between a salvation based on belief as one of several necessary conditions versus a salvation based on belief alone, we shall begin by examining the nature of a saving belief
1. There are cases in Scripture where belief simply means acknowledging Something to be true, but is that the belief the inspired writers are referencing in the passages just read?
 2. Does a saving belief in Jesus simply mean we accept as truth the fact that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins?
 - a. We know this is false because there are examples in Scripture of those who agreed with the fact that Jesus was the Son of God and yet they were neither saved nor accepted by God
 - 1) In James 2:19, the text reads: "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."
 - a) Demons know God and His Son but have no expectation of salvation
 - b) They have what may be called a passive belief
 - c) Although a passive belief in Jesus does agree and accept the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, that belief leads nowhere
 - d) It is useless, producing no personal response, no change in behavior, no positive outcome and no commitment
 - 2) In Matt 8:28-34, the demons believed but acknowledged their lost fate crying out: ". . . What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time? . . . "
 - 3) James spoke of the inadequacy of having faith in the truth of God without having works or actions to go with it
 - a) James 2:26 says: "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."
 - b) A saving belief is an active belief that produces an outward response, change in mind, change in behavior and commitment to Jesus
 - b. Consider John 2:23-26, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man."
 - 1) The text clearly says they believed in Jesus because of His miracles
 - 2) And yet Jesus knew their heart and did not accept them
 - 3) They had a passive belief that was not going to produce true disciples
 - 4) These believers did not commit to Jesus and so Jesus did not entrust Himself to them
 - c. John 12:42-43 tell us: "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they

would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."

- 1) Here is another case of those who accepted the truth that Jesus was the Son of God
 - 2) But, according to Matt 10:32-33, they were not saved because they would not confess the name of Jesus and denied Him to keep from being put out of the synagogue
3. A belief leading to salvation requires something more than simply accepting the fact that Jesus is the Son of God
- a. John 1:12 says: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,"
 - 1) Perhaps this verse provides the greatest insight
 - 2) By receiving Jesus and believing in His name, Jesus gave them the right and privilege of becoming children of God
 - 3) They were now eligible
 - 4) Notice it does not say they were made children of God right then and there
 - 5) They had met the first necessary condition by accepting Jesus as the Son of God, so salvation through Jesus was now a possibility
 - b. This view is confirmed in John 8:31-32, "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' "
 - 1) These Jews believed, but they had not yet been made free from sin
 - 2) By continuing in His Word, Jesus said
 - a) They are true disciples of Jesus and
 - b) Because of that, they will come to know the truth and that truth will make them free from sin (John 8:32-36)
 - c) Notice these believers were not yet free from the bonds of sin
 - d) That freedom required these believers in Jesus to continue in the Word to learn the Truth about salvation
 - 3) That truth consists of the other conditions necessary for salvation, namely repentance, confession and baptism
 - 4) There is more to it than just agreeing that Jesus is the Son of God, our Savior
4. The Biblical saving belief referenced by the inspired writers leads us not only to accept the truth of Jesus as the Son of God, our Savior, but also causes us to respond by taking action based on that belief
- a. It comes with an active commitment to follow Jesus
 - b. True believers are saved because they surrender to His will in obedience
 - c. The Scriptures call this the obedience of faith
 - 1) Note Rom 1:4-5, "who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,"
 - 2) The same term is used in Rom 16:25-26, "Now to Him who is able to

- establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;"
5. By using Scripture as a commentary on other Bible verses, we see salvation cannot be obtained by simply accepting the fact that Jesus is the Son of God.
 - a. Our belief must lead us to entrust ourselves to Him and commit to doing all that he has asked us to do
 - b. That is the Biblical concept of a saving belief, and it explains why Jesus spent time during His ministry talking about other necessary conditions for salvation
 - c. Moreover, this definition of belief harmonizes all the previous Scriptures
 6. A saving belief leads to the obedience of faith whereby we are willing to submit to His will
 - a. That is what motivates us to comply with the other things Jesus has required of us for salvation
 - b. This includes repenting, confessing and being baptized by immersion in water
 - c. Indeed, by having such an active belief, salvation is certain
 7. True believers are saved because they are obedient and have submitted to God's will
 - a. Notice Heb 5:8-9, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation"
 - b. This verse tells us Jesus provides salvation to all who obey Him
 - c. Obedience stems from an active/entrusting belief
 - d. In that sense, it is perfectly proper to say true believers have eternal life
- D. This perspective of how believers have eternal life is identical to the interpretation given to those who love the Lord
1. Notice James 2:5, "Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"
 2. Similarly James 1:12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.
 3. These verses promise that those who love the Lord will receive the crown of life and be heirs of the kingdom
 - a. Is this sufficient justification for proposing a doctrine of salvation requiring love only?
 - b. How are we to understand the proper meaning of these promises?
 - 1) We do so by harmonizing the meaning of these passages with other Scriptures
 - 2) In John 14:15, Jesus is quoted saying, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments"
 - 3) We see then that those who love the Lord, will keep all His commandments

- 4) Those commandments lead to salvation through belief, repentance, confession and baptism
 - 5) In the same way, it can be said that those who believe will receive the crown of life and be heirs of the kingdom
- E. If we attribute salvation to belief only as some suggest, then we are forgiven in the instant we mentally accept the fact that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins
1. That leads to some unusual conclusions
 2. Under such doctrine, repentance, confession and baptism are not required to have our sins forgiven
 - a. To believe without repenting means we would be living an ungodly life continuing to sin and still expect to spend eternity in Heaven with God;
 - b. That denies the Problem of Sin and contradicts the teachings from Isa 59:1-2 and Rom 6:1-2
 3. If those who believe are saved but must repent immediately after being saved to stay saved, then salvation must not have been granted in the first place, because without that instant repentance following belief, they are lost all over again
 4. If one must both repent and believe in order to be saved, then salvation does not come from belief only
 - a. That means belief alone is not sufficient for eternal life; repentance also is needed
 - b. This is contrary to the meaning that has been attributed to the various verses previously cited in support of the belief only doctrine
 - c. If that is the case, then we must accept the fact that something more than belief is necessary for salvation, namely confession, repentance and baptism also
 5. Indeed, the Bible does contain other passages directly linking belief to additional conditions for salvation
 - a. Even from His early ministry, we find Jesus commanding all to repent and believe saying: ". . . The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)
 - b. Peter said: "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19)
 - 1) Notice Peter called for people to repent first before their sins were forgiven
 - 2) He made repentance a necessary condition for salvation by proclaiming for them to repent "so that your sins may be wiped away"
 - 3) These times of refreshing were to be granted by God after repentance
 - c. Paul linked confession to belief in Rom 10:9 saying, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;"
 - 1) That confession is made during baptism

- 2) We see this in the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch recorded in Acts 8:36-38
 - d. Jesus Himself associated belief with baptism in Mark 16:16 saying, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved . . ."
 - e. Through these examples, we have identified separate passages linking and requiring belief and repentance, belief and confession, and belief and baptism
 - f. Since all Scripture is inspired when taken together these verses prove a saving belief is one that leads to and also includes repentance, confession and baptism
- F. Although Lessons 6 and 7 have documented many passages that declare salvation is attained by belief, repentance, confession and baptism, critics still cling to the fact that not all verses include all of these conditions
1. Some verses mention belief only
 2. We have addressed this issue by defining what the Bible means by a saving belief
 - a. It is an active belief that leads to an obedience of faith fulfilling all the conditions that Jesus cited as necessary for salvation
 - b. In that sense, an active belief does equate to eternal life
 - c. This understanding allows all the Scriptures on salvation to fit together perfectly
 3. Notice, however, the opposite is not true
 - a. If we contend that salvation is obtained by belief only when we accept the fact that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins, then we are saved without repentance, confession and baptism
 - b. That conflicts with the inspired verses taken from the ministry of Jesus, the Great Commission, the conversion accounts recorded in the book of Acts and the teachings found in the New Testament letters
 - c. Moreover, these conflicts cannot be resolved
- III. Further clarity on this issue and perhaps another way to arrive at the truth about salvation, is to determine exactly when our sins are forgiven
- A. To do so, we must find Scriptures directly answering that question
 - B. Please join me for Lesson 9 as we discover what the Bible tells us about the purpose and meaning of water baptism