

## We Are Not Saved Yet!

*Preface note: As you read this, please know I believe that salvation is by God's grace and not of works lest any man should boast. I believe that this truth is foundational and deviation from it is antichrist at its core. As you read this article, you might fall into the trap of assuming I teach that salvation is by works. If you begin to think this, keep reading and I will eventually show how salvation by God's grace is fully compatible with what this article teaches.*

It is very common to hear Christians describe salvation as an event that occurred at some point in their past. Perhaps you have said at some point, "I am saved" or "God saved me!" Most of us have sung the words, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that *saved* a wretch like me." I understand the essence of this expression. But is there any danger in viewing salvation as something that has occurred at some point in our past? Does the Bible speak of salvation as something that occurs when a person first believes or is salvation something that occurs when Jesus comes back?

Let me suggest that many current Protestant traditions and teachings do indeed cloud this issue. As a result, many New Testament passages, if one dares to examine them honestly, almost seem to contradict commonly held views of salvation. It is my hope to demonstrate how the New Testament writers understood salvation and bring to light some of the concepts that they taught for the purpose of motivating Christians to live godly lives.

The English word salvation is translated from the Greek word *soteria* (Strong's word 4991). When the New Testament uses the word salvation (*soteria*) to describe the result of Jesus' work on the cross in our behalf, it is almost universally used to describe the salvation that will take place in the future when Jesus returns to judge the world. So, if you were to go back in time and ask the New Testament writers what they meant when they used the word *soteria*, the first concept that would come into their mind would be the salvation that takes place when Jesus comes back to judge the world. Below are a few verses that serve as examples.

Paul said that our salvation is something that will take place in the future:

*"Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation<sup>G4991</sup> nearer than when we believed" (Romans 13:11).*

Paul told Timothy to pay close attention to himself and his teaching and to persevere in these things. He said that by doing so, Timothy would ensure salvation (clearly from the future judgment) for both himself and those he teaches:

*Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation<sup>G4982</sup> both for yourself and for those who hear you" (I Tim 4:16).* (Obviously, Timothy was a believer when Paul wrote these words to him.)

Not only did Paul clearly teach that salvation was yet future, he taught Timothy that he must persevere in order to obtain salvation. In order to obtain salvation, he (and we) must not fall asleep spiritually. We must NOT RELAX. We must be on high alert looking earnestly for Jesus to come back. Concerning the coming judgment, Paul wrote the following exhortation:

*"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet,*

the hope of salvation<sup>G4991</sup>. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation<sup>G4991</sup> by our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thessalonians 5:1-8).

Paul says that the hope of our future salvation from the coming outpouring of wrath is essential spiritual protection (as pictured with the use of the word helmet). We miss the protection Paul had in mind if we wrongly believe that salvation is something that occurred in our past. Only as we are on heightened readiness about the coming judgment and holding fast to the hope that we will be delivered from the outpouring of God’s wrath will we receive the spiritual protection afforded by the helmet, the hope of salvation.

Peter expressed similar sentiments. “*Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (I Peter 1:13). Clearly, Peter was talking about the salvation from the wrath of God when Jesus comes back and glorifies us through resurrection.*

I believe that we are saved by God’s grace. In the end, there will be no inclination on our part to take any credit for the fact that we escaped the wrath of God that we fully deserve. Jesus paid it all. God accepted His death as payment in full and by it, we HAVE BEEN reconciled to God.

I also believe that it is God who takes people who were at one time a part of the kingdom of darkness, and gives them to Jesus. (See John 6:37-40.) Because of God’s effectual grace working in them, they turn to Jesus by faith and none of these that God gives to Jesus are ever lost. Jesus promised to raise every single one of them on the last day. Thus, salvation is guaranteed because of God’s grace and the finished work of Jesus. Clearly, in God’s way of salvation, God is the one who deserves all the credit. If it were not for Him, we would never turn to Jesus and we would never remain with Jesus.

The truth that salvation is by God’s grace is a wonderful, comforting doctrine. Unfortunately, it seems as if many people falsely think of future salvation from the wrath of God (at the judgment) as if it is already a done deal, like something that has already occurred. Such thinking produces a lack of urgency about being ready for the judgment. It breeds complacency. This is not how Jesus and the Apostles taught the believers to think!

We are indeed saved by grace but this salvation is obtained by faith. In order to obtain salvation from the wrath of God that is coming upon the earth, we must believe and keep on believing. “Believing” in the New Testament is never taught as an event that took place in the past as if it was merely a decision to adopt a certain belief system. It is an ongoing thing and IT ALWAYS PRODUCES WORKS. “***We are His workmanship , created in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS***” (Ephesians 2:10a). This verse tells us God’s purpose for reconciling us in the first place...FOR GOOD WORKS. It does not say, “We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus so that we should then sit on our butts, kick back and assume that we will be saved at the judgment.” On the contrary, consider verses like these that follow.

*“Wherefore my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**” (Philippians 2:12).*

In the passage above, Paul gives the Philippians the impression that their salvation depends on their works. In reality it does. But driving those works is faith. Only those who truly believe God experience this type of fear and trembling. It is God’s grace that caused our hearts to fear in the first place.

In the next two passages, we see that Paul clearly taught that salvation will only come only to those who endure throughout their lives with faith that produces a holy life.

*“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to **present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight**—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Col 1:22-23).*

*“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain” (I Corinthians 15:1-2).*

The writer of the book of Hebrews expresses similar sentiments:

*“Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb 3:5,6,14).*

*“For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:36-39).*

Peter also believed that to inherit salvation that will be revealed in the last time, we must continue in faith. Our continuing results in the salvation of our souls. Peter uses the phrase “the end of your faith” or “the outcome of your faith” to show a cause-and-effect relationship. But the salvation comes in the last time.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.... Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup>receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:3-5,8,9).*

*“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup>looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” (II Peter 3:10-12).*

Peter was speaking to believers in the passage above. If the salvation was something in their past, then there would be no reason for Peter to say these things. But Peter clearly believed that reminding them of the coming judgment should produce motivation in believers to live holy, godly lives lest they find themselves being burned up in the judgment.

When Jesus was preparing His disciples for evangelism ministry, He warned them that they would be hated by all and go through many difficult times. Their faith would be tested indeed and only those disciples who endured until the end would end up being saved at the judgment:

*“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup>But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; <sup>20</sup>for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. <sup>21</sup>“Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. <sup>22</sup>And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. (Matt 10:16-22).*

Paul indicated something similar in the passage below. Both of these passages indicate that saving faith must continue even while under intense pressure brought about by persecution and threat of death. It is not a so called “nominal” faith that might be evidenced by mere church attendance.

*“When they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21-22).*

John used the word “overcome” to describe what a person must do in order to be saved in the end.

*“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (I John 5:4-5).*

Some believe that this merely speaks of a decision to become a Christian. But the word “overcome” suggests active involvement in a battle against the world. This active involvement shows up in one’s character and conduct as we see in another passage from John:

*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev 21:7-8).*

The overcoming is made possible by faith that results in a holy life of ongoing faith. Those who don’t overcome will have their part in the lake of fire. They will not partake of the looked-for salvation.

Going along with these things is the numerous times that the Bible says the judgment will be based upon our works. Below are just two from the New Testament.

*But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup>who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: <sup>7</sup>eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; <sup>8</sup>but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, <sup>9</sup>tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; <sup>10</sup>but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup>For there is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:5-11).*

*“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (II Corinthians 5:9-10).*

Salvation is by God’s grace! But this grace makes a person spiritually alive and this is always evidenced by a changed life that increasingly takes on the characteristics of Jesus’ life. These people patiently continue to do good seeking for glory, honor and immortality. They work what is good and they continue doing so until they die because they really do believe that judgment is coming upon the earth. They do not want to hear Jesus say, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

When we understand salvation as something yet in the future, suddenly, other New Testament passages seem to make more sense. Since our salvation is the result of our faith while we live out our lives, then Peter’s words have more impact:

*“If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (I Peter 1:17).*

With this view of salvation, Mathew chapter 25 has much more bite! Also, Jesus' warning to strive to enter in at the narrow gate makes more sense:

*"Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, **Strive** to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are" (Luke 13:23-25).*

We must strive and keep on striving because we believe what God has said about the judgment that is coming upon the earth. This is exactly how Noah conducted himself when God told him that He was going to flood the earth. Noah really, really believed God and kept believing Him for one hundred years while he built the ark. If he stopped striving, he would have perished with everyone else on earth. And the New Testament book to the Hebrews holds Noah up as an example of someone who had saving faith.

We also see from Paul's own testimony that he did not consider his salvation a done deal. Rather, he strove to enter in at the narrow gate:

*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:7-14)*

In conclusion, let us strive together in fear and trembling, pressing toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

End Note A: Most of the quotations in this article are from the KJV.

End Note B: The verb form of *soteria* (G4991) is the word *sozo* (G4982). A careful word study of the verb form (*sozo*) will not diminish the point of this article. There are a few instances of this word conveying something that took place in our past. (*By grace have we been saved- Ephesians 2:5 & 8.*) But the verb form (*sozo*) of this word must be understood always by how it is used in its immediate context. For example, in some cases, it was used to describe the saving of a physical life. In some cases, it was used to describe being made whole through physical healing. When it is used in passages like Ephesians 2:8, it is not conveying the salvation that will be received when Jesus comes back to judge the world. It conveys more of an idea of being made spiritually whole. In most cases, the verb form (*sozo*) is used to describe being saved from the wrath of God that is coming upon the earth as shown in the passage below:

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8-10).*