

## WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Robert F. Turner

Is this a legitimate question, in keeping with the divine scheme of redemption, having a divine answer? Recent zealous efforts to “stress the man, not the plan”; or well intended writings and sermons on “Grace and Justification by Faith” have tended to deny this question a legitimate place. The infidel would answer, “Do nothing—there is no salvation.” The universalist would answer, “Do nothing—all will be saved anyhow.” The Calvinist would say, “Do nothing—only the elect will be saved, and that by imposition of irresistible grace.” And a great host of others, semi-Calvinists or derivatives of the system would say, “Do nothing—faith alone is sufficient.” The scriptures teach that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our redemption; but we have shown that this justifying faith exists only where there is active, obedient service to the Lord. All efforts to divorce saving faith from “doing”—however well intended—make for a confused jumble of terms, and lead toward classic evangelical or Calvinistic theology.

Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). He will take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ (2 Thes. 1:8). (The word for gospel here is the same as in 1 Cor. 15:1.) We must obey from the heart that form of doctrine (Rom. 6:17). By a rhetorical question Peter portends dire results for those who “*obey not the gospel of God*” (1 Pet. 4:1, 7); while Paul spells it out for us (Judicial) “indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish” (Rom. 2:8-9). We may write books explaining that this doing is an expression of faith—and I’ll buy that—but when we are finished, the fact remains that we are acceptable in God’s sight, only if we “do something”. Our “doing” will be imperfect and therefore cannot justify (make free from guilt) on a legalistic basis. It does not “merit (by virtue of incompleteness) a free from guilt” appraisal, but one cannot deny the need for obedience without ignoring plain scriptures.

Passing by the old-line predestinarians, the problem seems to arise in differentiating “doing as the *means* or price of redemption (“buying back” from sin), and “doing as the expression of one’s faith in Christ”, who died for us. Put this way, the choice is clear. Then why do we not “put it this way?” Restoration preachers contended with false doctrine having a “faith only” background, and taught pioneer people, most of whom were illiterate. Simple, direct, and practical sermons were necessary, so they developed outlines and illustrations of this nature. One must remember they were speaking to people who already knew of Jesus Christ and his crucifixion. Usually they were trying to correct their thinking on what was meant by “saving faith” or submission to Christ as Lord—phrases repeated glibly, with little understanding of their practical application. Under such circumstances it is understandable how “Believe, Repent, Confess, and be Baptized”, could develop a sort of “push button plan for salvation.” It is most unfair, however, to charge them with not knowing, or of slighting Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Today I believe there are preachers who have inherited the “outlines” but have failed to understand the matters they were teaching. When such preachers “discover” that Christ is our Savior, and realize that acceptable service must be upon a basis of trust in Him, they sometimes get “carried away” with their “new awakening”. They rush to study anew the Roman letter, or Galatians, or Ephesians. The commentaries they use are about 80% Calvinistic, and they gulp down the conclusions of such men without realizing they are being “hooked”. They easily forget that but recently they were preaching the “steps” to salvation. Perhaps their ridicule of “unlearned legalists” stems from memory of their own earlier work, and pride keeps them from recognizing that others knew the truth when they were completely confused. Well, whatever the reason, we should take care that our “new light” statements do not negate the teachings of scriptures, considered as a whole. As we delve into more mature studies concerning the relation of obedience to faith, and of faith to its object, Jesus Christ, we must remember that the Holy Spirit gave specific answers to “What Must I Do?”

K. C. Moser, in *Way of Salvation*, correctly states “by law no one can be justified, for no one can be perfect” (p. 23). He could have spared himself many “misunderstandings” readers by keeping this “perfect” (“do all” Gal. 3:10) aspect of the system of “works” before them. But in his zeal to maintain his quasi-faith-only concept he tends to make all “work” a forbidden four-letter word. He says, “It is forgotten that grace and works are naturally opposed, however weakened works may be.” (p. 39) In such a statement he aborts his original scriptural definition of justification by works (meriting a “free-from-guilt” judgment through perfect obedience) and infringes upon the scriptural definition of “*faith which worketh by love*” (Gal. 5:6). Grace and works of faith are NOT “naturally” or scripturally opposed. I believe brother Moser was seeking to negate “doing” as a “push button” means of redemption. He certainly recognized that we must find forgiveness in Christ’s blood, but his earlier concepts of imputed righteousness, and the functions he assigned the “personally indwelling Holy Spirit” seemed to color his thinking. I regret to note that the influence of this 1932 publication seems to be coloring the thinking of students today.

We digress here to say that in K. C. Moser’s *Gist of Romans* (written in 1957, revised 1958) he says, “As we have seen under (Rom.) 3:21 ‘righteousness’ in this context is used in the sense of justification. It does not refer, therefore, to the personal righteousness of God or of Christ. The personal righteousness of God or of Christ is not transferred to the believer so that he is made subjectively righteous, and hence, acceptable to God.” (p. 31, *Gist of Romans*)

When Paul said of the Jews, “*they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness,*” he meant they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and hence, His death on the cross as the means of their redemption. When he continues, “*and going about to establish their own righteousness*” (Rom. 10:1-f), he refers to their efforts for justification via a system of law—the context throughout demands this. He was not negating obedience as such,

nor pitting obedience against grace or faith. It is poor exegesis to so ignore the context as to make this say that “doing” is “human righteousness” and condemned as such.

Isa. 64:5-7 says Jehovah “*s pares*” (A. S. footnote) him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness. But “*we are become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment.*” This passage does not ridicule “doing” as worthless—it sanctions “doing” but charges that Israel had turned away from serving God. What a pity that some have accepted the Baptist and other Calvinistic interpretations of this scripture.

Can human behavior affect an individual’s destiny? Jesus said, “...*ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*” This passage (Jn. 8:24) clearly answers, “Yes, we can alter our destiny.” The same is true of Luke 13:3 “...*except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*” Are not faith and godly sorrow “human behavior”? As respects salvation from sin, brother Moser gets around this by saying they are “natural” responses to the grace of God, but this begs the question. Are they human responses? When Christ said “*He that believeth and is a baptized shall be saved*” (Mk. 16:16), a fair exegesis demands that in the absence of these one will not be saved. We can say baptism is an act of faith, but we haven’t removed “human behavior” unless—unless—we are ready to accept the Calvinistic concept that faith is a gift of God. I will be pained but not surprised to hear this (or derivatives of it) among brethren who are now toying with the Calvinistic concept of redemption.

Jesus Christ is the *means* of our salvation. We must realize that we are lost in sin, and that as sinners we must die. Christ died in our stead—he “bought” us with his own blood. Now, no matter what anyone *does*, that *doing* (including faith) is not the *means* of satisfying the Justice of God, against whom we sinned. All were dead in sin, and Christ died for all mankind (2 Cor. 5:14-15). But He is “*Savior of all men, specially to those that believe*” (1 Tim. 4:10). The means of redemption has universal application, it is available to all. But the appropriation or reception of this salvation is on an individual basis—made contingent upon some response by the individual. Having sinned, we cannot “merit” or “earn” our salvation by any amount of “doing”; but we must “do” something in our acceptance of Christ as Savior. This is wholly in keeping with the free agency of man—the gospel God gave is suited to the man God made. Man expresses choice when he sins, and God expects man to express choice in his return.

The Holy Spirit is the *means* of divine revelation. He revealed unto chosen messengers that which they could not otherwise have known (1 Cor. 2:11-13); and Paul calls this a manifestation of God’s grace (Eph. 3:2-7; Titus 2:11). But the *appropriation* of heaven’s message awaits man’s reading and study—an exercise of man’s free will. Moser’s concepts are shaky on this point, for he says,

“The Spirit of God may *lead in two ways*. He may lead us through the word of God, or he may lead us in the sense of inciting us to a holy life. The context argues for the latter leading.” (on Rom. 8:14, *Gist of Romans*)

The context (v. 13) says, “*you*” mortify the deeds of the body, being lead by God’s Spirit. The link between God’s revelation (in His word) and the action, is the free agency of man. But our generation is being fed all sorts of tidbits concerning immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, and made to feel that “human implementation” is “boasting”.

The acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Savior calls for complete self-surrendery: a recognition of unworthiness, and a casting of one’s self upon the mercies of God. Should someone say, “I have been baptized, therefore God owes me salvation!” I would reply, “With an attitude like that, you could not have been scripturally baptized.” But when believers in Christ ask me what they should do for the remission of their sins, I will answer “*Repent, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ*” (Acts 2:38). Let no man claim to be a “gospel” preacher, who seeks to improve upon God’s way of bestowing His grace.

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