

Hearing, Trusting, and Salvation

Barry O'Dell

Paul wrote, *"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will: That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in Whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise"* (Eph. 1:11-13). The book of Ephesians is all about Jesus and the blessings and responsibilities that those who are *"in Him"* have. There are nearly thirty references to *"in Him," "by Him,"* or *"through Him"* in the six chapters of Paul's letter. The words *church* and *body* are both used nine times by the author. There is clearly a significant link to one's salvation and being *"in"* the body/church of Christ throughout the epistle.

The church in Ephesus was established by Paul as he was on his third missionary journey (Acts 19). The Ephesians had already been exposed to some teaching from the Scriptures prior to Paul's arrival. We are told, *"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue..."* (Acts 18:24-26). Upon Paul's arrival to Ephesus we read, *"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 19:1-5). The Lord's church began in the city of Ephesus when twelve men (specifically males) were baptized *"in the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 19:7).

In order to understand Ephesians 1:11-13, there has to be a clear understanding of what Paul did when he

got there. Notice that Ephesians 1:13 reveals that those people *"trusted"* and *"believed."* That trust and belief occurred *"after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."* When you couple the verses in Ephesians 1 with what is revealed in Acts 19:1-7, it becomes abundantly clear as to *when* their salvation became a reality. It occurred, just as Jesus instructed, after they heard the gospel and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15-16).

Another point that is very important to notice is that the Ephesians did not *"receive the Holy Spirit"* until Paul, an apostle, laid hands on them (Acts 19:6). We are told that same thing in Acts 8:14-19. The Holy Spirit could only be given/received when an apostle laid his hands upon the one who had been baptized. This is what Paul was referring to in Ephesians 1:13 when he wrote, *"...in Whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."* While many struggle to interpret what that verse means, the Ephesians understood it perfectly because of what they experienced. Upon their reception of the Holy Spirit

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they *"spake with tongues and prophesied"* (Acts 19:6). That was the seal - the token or mark that they were now God's people (Mk. 16:16-17). These things do not occur today as we do not have

apostles walking around on the earth.

The Ephesians placed their trust/faith in Jesus when they heard the gospel. They did what was commanded by an inspired apostle and were added to the body of Christ. Man is saved by faith (Rom. 5:1-2). What about hearing? Paul wrote, *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Rom. 10:13-17). No man can be saved apart from hearing the gospel preached and placing his faith in God. Romans 10:16 points out that not everyone has obeyed the gospel. Without hearing, obedience will never occur. Let us be willing to *hear* the gospel and respond in *faithful* obedience to its demands.

There are many things in our material world today that constantly change and rearrange. New things come and go and it is a full-time job to keep up with the times as the sons of Issachar did in I Chronicles 12. Although we live in a world of change, there are some things that will never change. There is something that you and I have that no one can take from us. No one can ever take away the fact that Christ Jesus bled and died on the cross for you and me. It is because of the great sacrifice that Christ made, that if we obey God's will and follow the plan of salvation laid out in Scripture, we can have a home in Heaven.

In First Timothy 1:15, Paul wrote that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The one thing that keeps humans away from God is sin. Before Jesus came on this earth there wasn't a way that humans could deal with this sin problem. This puts us in quite the situation because we read a verse like Romans 3:23 that says, "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" Luckily, God showed grace on the human race and sent His only Son to the cross so that there was a way for our sins to be washed away. Acts 2:38 says, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.*" Take what Acts 2:38 says and combine it with Romans 6:3 and then we can understand that through the death of Christ Jesus we can be baptized and have remission of sins.

Let's look at an illustration that will make it a little easier to grasp this concept. Consider this, you are in your backyard with a shovel, and every time you sin in your life you take that shovel and dig. Time goes by and that hole keeps getting deeper and deeper. One day you look up and realize you are stuck in that hole with nowhere to go. Maybe it's the case that you have felt this way in the past, lonely and scared with nowhere to go. Just as soon as you feel you can't go any deeper, you look behind you and there is a rope. As you might have guessed, that rope is Jesus. In fact, did you know that the name Jesus means to deliver or to rescue? That rope is there to rescue you, but you have to grab ahold and trust that it will save you and bring you out of those sins. We have to put our trust in Jesus and by trusting Him, we will follow His commandments and obey the Scriptures (Jn. 14:15).

It might be the case that you are wondering if there are any other ways that the sins of the world

could be forgiven that do not include the death of Christ. If you have had or are having this thought, you are not alone. In fact, the Son of God Himself was asking this same question while praying to the Father just moments before He was hung on the cross, according to Matthew 26:39. Jesus said in the last part of verse 39, "*Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*" Unfortunately, we see in Hebrews 9:22 that without the shedding of blood (from Christ Jesus) there is no remission of sins. Why is this you might ask? There are two principles that will help in understanding this. The first principle that we need to understand is that the only way to have remission of sins is to understand that there is life in the blood. We can see this from Genesis 9:4 that the life of someone comes from the blood. This principle is something that we have discovered through medical advancements as well. Our blood carries oxygen and other important nutrients throughout the body and, without that blood flowing through us, there is no life. The second principle to examine is that God's

W *e have to put our trust in Jesus...*

justice requires life for life. The same God that is loving and merciful is at the same time a just God. Deuteronomy 19:21 shows us that life shall go for life because the justice of God demands it. The conclusion to take from this is that there is life in the blood and God's justice requires life for life so there was no choice but for Jesus to shed blood for the sins of mankind.

In Hebrews 5:8-9 we are told that Christ Jesus, through obedience in the things He suffered, was made perfect and became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him. Take notice at the last part of verse 9, - "*unto all them that obey Him.*" We cannot simply gain salvation by just believing in Christ Jesus, we have to obey Him and follow His word. In order for us to be with Christ, we have to be obedient to His commandments and heed to what it teaches and requires of us. The Bible is quite clear that without the perfect sacrifice of Christ Jesus that you and I would be in a bad situation. We talked about the fact that if there was no death then there would be no remission of sins. We also observed that the sacrifice had to be a life and it had to be the Son of God, Christ Jesus. I'll finish this the same way that it was started: do not place your salvation in something worldly or the word of man. Place your salvation in Christ Jesus and the word of God.

We are told about Jesus in the book of Hebrews, *“Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him”* (Heb. 5:8-9). While it is true that the book of Hebrews was written to those who were already saved, it still stands true that one who is outside of Christ must obey in order to be saved. Jesus said it like this, *“Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matt. 7:21-23). When he wrote to Titus, Paul said, *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”* (Titus 2:11-14).

There are many examples in the Old Testament that illustrate the necessity of obedience in order to be saved. Of Noah we are told, *“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith”* (Heb. 11:7). While the physical lives of eight people were saved, it is also the case that their souls would have been lost if the ark had not been constructed. Noah would not have been referred to as an *“heir of righteousness which is by faith”* if he had not done as God commanded.

The same chapter says of another hero of faith, *“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive as an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went”* (Heb. 11:8). What would have happened to Abraham’s soul if he had not obeyed?

There is simply no substitute for doing what God

requires. A person might pray to God every day, multiple times a day, however, if he never obeys the gospel, he cannot be saved. *“Going to church”* will not save a soul if that soul has never confessed faith in Christ and been baptized for the remission of sins. There is nothing that one can do that will take the place of simply doing what God commands! When King Saul rebelled against the command of God, Samuel told him, *“Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”* (1 Sam. 15:22).

A key to obedience is humility. The psalmist wrote, *“For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise”* (Ps. 51:16-17). In the case of King Saul, he was condemned because he was rebellious and stubborn

(1 Sam. 15:23). That is the exact opposite of being humble and submissive. When speaking to Cornelius and his household Peter said, *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of*

persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:34-35). Psalm 119:172 informs us that *“all Thy [God’s] commandments are righteousness.”* In order to be declared righteous by God, one must keep His commandments.

What about objections to this idea that obeying commandments is necessary for salvation? After all, there are some would have us believe that any teaching about “acts of obedience” somehow takes away from the grace of God. Is that true? For the dedicated student of God’s word, it should be abundantly clear that obedience to the commands of God does not add to or take away from the grace of God. In fact, it is by the grace of God that we even know what He requires. Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus, *“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified”* (Acts 20:32). The apostle John wrote, *“Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city”* (Rev. 22:14). There is no way to be saved from sin without doing what God requires!

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The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Saved by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Heard, believed, baptized (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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