

How Much Disobedience?

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“The only thing which can limit or restrict our faith is our willingness to obey.” (Ian Vincent)

Day One

There are some who teach that a person is not saved until or unless they are baptized in water and baptized in the Holy Spirit. How we react to this teaching – which is neither completely wrong nor completely right! – will show us much about ourselves. It will show us whether we are seeking God by way of spirit and truth or whether we are simply participating in religion and empty “theological” strife and knowledge.

The question this really raises (and this question applies equally well to other issues too) is: How much disobedience can we practice and still be “saved”? This is an important question even though it is not one that can be answered with mere “doctrine” or “theology.” In truth, it is a question that can be answered only by God for each individual – and when that individual hears the answer, it may be far too late to change one’s eternal destiny! It is in this light that this becomes a very important question indeed.

“Saved” is one of those words that easily lends itself to distortions. Consider:

- “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” (Jn. 3:17) If we isolated this verse to itself, we could (and some indeed have!) concoct a doctrine that says the whole world will be saved.

- “And the Lord added to the ekklesia daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47) If we isolated this verse, we could (and some indeed have!) concoct a doctrine that says the Lord does all the work in saving people (thus negating the need for repentance, surrender and obedience.)

With these instances in view (and we could add more), let us return to the question of baptism in water and by the Spirit as necessary elements of salvation. The classic objection to the need for water and Spirit baptism is “If someone receives Christ one day and immediately gets killed and doesn’t have a chance to get water and Spirit baptized that person is still going to heaven.” This is an obvious truth. And we can look at the example of the thief on the cross beside Him, “Today you will be in paradise with Me.” (Lk. 23:43) Though one can raise “technical” issues about the timing of this salvation (before the resurrection, before the outpouring of the Spirit, etc.), it remains true that water baptism simply was not an option for this man who died shortly after receiving Jesus’ promise! If we were forced to make a doctrine out of all this, the only thing we could legitimately conclude is that all those who die immediately after having received Jesus’ promise of eternal life are indeed saved because their short race has been run. (also see the parable of the workers – Mt. 20:9-12) This surely applies also to any who make what is commonly called a “death bed confession” (however unlikely these things are in real life) and do genuinely receive the Lord Jesus Christ in the last seconds of their life.

Day Two

Such a doctrine as we have just constructed, however, would not apply in any way to those who survive their first day in the Lord! For those who survive past their first day in the Lord – and the vast majority of those who have a real encounter and salvation experience with Christ do! – other standards and principles come into effect.

Consider:

- Jesus said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be condemned.” (Mk. 16:16) Here is the “proof text” for those who have made an inviolable doctrine that without water baptism, one cannot be saved. Yet even here it also says that only those who do not believe will be condemned. Which is it? The answer, which defies all those who like to build doctrines, is “yes.”

- Jesus said, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” (Jn. 10:9) According to this verse (which some have used to formulate doctrine), all one has to do is “enter” to be saved. Yet Jesus also spoke of the narrow way that *leads away* from the gate to eternal life. (Mt. 7:14)

- Both Peter and Paul preached “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:21, Rom. 10:13) These are the quintessential “proof texts” for those who insist that all we need do is “call on the name of the Lord” to be saved. Yet Paul also writes, “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let every one who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness.” (2 Tim. 2:19)

- Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31) This is the quintessential “proof text” for those who espouse the “only believe” teachings (that again negate the need for repentance and obedience.) Yet the writer of Hebrews, after giving instruction and illustration of the danger of falling away and being rejected, speaks of “things that accompany salvation.” (Heb. 6:9)

- Paul wrote, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Rom. 10:9) This is the quintessential “proof text” for those who say we need only “confess” and “believe” to be saved. Yet John writes, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 Jn. 1:9) If we have been forgiven our sins and the load of our guilt and shame has been removed and we have tasted of the righteousness of Christ and God, how can we continue to live in sin and believe ourselves saved?

These instances where texts have been isolated to create misleading doctrines about salvation shows us that our problem is that we want to legalize and quantify and make religious

standards (doctrines and dogmas) by which we can control how much “Christianity” we participate in but we don’t want to simply let God be God.

As one modern prophet has rightly said, “When you’re born in fire you cannot stay in smoke and like it. No one can pretend [to have Christ’s life within] – if it’s there, it’s there. But we love so many other things.” (Ulf Christiannson) As Paul wrote, “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another” (Gal. 5:17) and “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” (Rom. 8:7) It remains true that God’s love, mercy and forgiveness sounds too good to be true, like something from a dream. But God’s love is true and all of it is available to us. We don’t have to earn His love and forgiveness – He freely gives these to all who believe. But if we do truly receive Him as both Savior and Lord, we will see significant changes right away because our life becomes His and His life becomes our own. If we don’t see these changes, we can know that we have been deceived. If He is not our Lord (Master, King), then He truly is not our Savior either.

We must never forget, though, that God does not really deal with us through “doctrines,” dogma and legalistic standards. We may start there but that is spiritual infancy at best. He calls us to Himself. Yes, He has standards (which, in truth, are known only in the heart and counsels of God and must come from the mind of Christ if they are to bring life rather than bondage) and He will apply these when He judges all men. (see Rom. 2:6-11 for example) But God’s standards are personal and individual (taking into account what light a person has and how they respond to it) while remaining both just and merciful (recognizing that Christ came to save and not condemn mankind.) God is not religiously and ruthlessly “correct” in His dealings with us as so many “Christian” “theologians” would have us believe.

Departure From the Faith

But what is absent from all this doctrinalizing and arguing about what is required for salvation is the need for repentance and obedience. Those who survive past their first day in the Lord need to surrender to His will (and this is where the need for water and Spirit baptism enter the picture) or they will begin the journey back onto the path that leads to destruction. And, of course, there are carnal and confused “theologians” who will deny that this is even a possibility! That there are so many who claim to be “Christians” but who do not practice either repentance or obedience to God is only evidence of how effective Satan’s schemes are in luring people away from Christ and God. Consider:

- Someone asked Jesus, “Are there few that will be saved?” Jesus answered, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” (Lk. 13:23-24) When Jesus was asked about how many would be saved, He said to *strive* to enter the narrow gate (which differs greatly from the easy believe-isms taught at many “churches”) and that *many* would seek to enter (to be saved) and *not be able*. At the least, it would certainly seem that Jesus’ idea of salvation is very different from the modern notions!

- Paul wrote, “[By the gospel] you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:2) We are saved *if we hold fast* the word that was implanted in our soul, the word that is able

to save our soul. (see Jas. 1:21) It is only the mature saint who has always held fast this implanted word who is qualified to be an elder in the body of Christ. (Tit. 1:9) At the least, we should be able to see that modern practices are very different from the original ideas of salvation!

- Paul also wrote, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will *depart from the faith*, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” (1 Tim. 4:1) We must either accept Paul’s prophetic statement as meaning what it says or we need to clip this verse out of the New Testament (which some basically do) or we need to abandon the idea that the New Testament is inspired by God. We simply do not have many options with this plain statement that departing from the faith is not only possible, it *will* happen.

- Jude wrote, “But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.” (Jude 5) It is obvious that Jude did not subscribe to the “once saved always saved” theory! Here he warns his readers that they need to remember that they could be like the Israelites who were saved from Egypt (a type of bondage to sin) and be destroyed as were those who did not believe.

There are other verses that could be brought out to show that modern “theology” differs greatly from what is actually written and said. But this is enough for the discussion at hand.

Saved From What?

When we want to see the original context of what it means to be saved, we need to ask “What are we saved *from*?” The usual answer given is that we are saved from hell. But there is not one single verse in the whole Bible that says we are saved from hell. Not one. How then did we get a “gospel” that tells us all we need to do is pray a “sinner’s prayer,” receive Jesus in our hearts, faithfully attend “church” and we will be saved from hell and go to heaven? Satan’s deceptions are much more effective than most give him credit for, that’s how.

The closest the New Testament comes to this notion is where Paul writes, “Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (Rom. 5:9) But saying that we will be saved from God’s wrath is not exactly the same as saying that we will be saved from hell. They are related but there is a factor missing. Hell is a place – and yes, we do not have to go to that place. But that place is reserved for those who will share in the condemnation of the devil and his angels. (Mt. 25:41) If we have not qualified for this condemnation, we will not be sent to that place. This is the factor missing from the “gospel” that preaches salvation equals “not going to hell.”

When we read about Jesus’ mission, we find that Joseph was instructed, “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their *sins*.” (Mt. 1:21) That Jesus would save His people from their sins (those actions and behaviors that qualify them to share in the devil’s condemnation), is echoed by James who wrote, “He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” (Jas. 5:20) Our soul is saved from the second death when we turn from the error of our way. We are saved and delivered from our *sins* and, in this way, we are diverted from the path that leads to destruction.

Paul writes of the same thing when, quoting the prophet Isaiah, he says, “And so all Israel will be saved (delivered), as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’” (Rom. 11:26-27) Paul also wrote that “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4) God did not send Jesus to die on the cross just so that we could continue in our sins and have a “get out of hell free” card. Such a “gospel” is an abomination because if we are not saved from our sins, we have abandoned the very reason Jesus died on the cross!

We must recognize our responsibility to put away our sins and our flesh nature. Paul wrote, “The holy anger of God falls upon those who refuse to obey Him.” (Col. 3:6 – Phillips) And, “You once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” (Eph. 2:2-3) Today’s “theology” teaches us that, as if by some magic trick, so long as we have “accepted” Jesus into our hearts, we are no longer sons of disobedience and no longer children deserving God’s anger and wrath. We may live in any manner we please – if we like, we may stop practicing sins we don’t really like but continue on in the ones we do like. Or we can just continue on in whatever sins habitually bind us and keep us from being and doing what God intends. It’s all by “grace” so our sins are not a factor in whether we are really saved or not. This is an abominable false “gospel”!

It is true that “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Ths. 5:9) but we dare not isolate this text and take only this part that sounds good to us. Paul wrote, “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” (1 Ths. 5:8-10) How different the idea sounds when presented in its fullness and not just isolated to what we want to hear! Those who are truly sons of light and sons of the day must be sons of obedience or we have no hope that we should live together with Him who is light and truth.

Obedience Is Required

After we have come to know Christ in the depths of our being, are we not commanded and led to be baptized in water? Are we not commanded and led to be baptized in the Spirit? Even those who are in the midst of a rather distorted version of churchianity and who have anything genuine with the Lord Jesus Christ are prompted toward these things.

It is at this point, as we move from day two to week two or month two or beyond, that still more other standards and principles come into effect. The objection raised against these standards and principles is sometimes said in this way: “I hope you don’t mean that people from Lutheran and Catholic background are not saved... Salvation is more about what God does than what we do. This is a gift we receive by faith.” But we have to use the rightly divided Scriptures – and not our experiences or our wishful thinking – as the basis for teaching truth. A person is not saved because they have a Lutheran or Catholic (or any other denominational label) background. A person is saved because Christ Himself, the Word, has been implanted in their soul so that they may be saved. At that point, they must be doers of the Word and not merely hearers, deceiving themselves. (Jas. 1:21-22) And the writer of Hebrews tells us that “once made perfect, Christ became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him” – not for those who

disobey Him! (Heb. 5:9) If a person's "theological," "doctrinal," or denominational background causes them to disobey Christ and God, how can such a person believe themselves to be saved? How much disobedience can we practice and still be saved? God be merciful to us and let us praise Him for overlooking our ignorance and blindness. Then let us rise from the dust and the ashes and press on after Him in greater wisdom and obedience than ever before!

When we are involved with a "Christian" franchise that distorts the salvation process or the spiritual maturing process (and almost all do in one way or another – some don't even try to provide such things!), we will be spiritually deformed until Christ resets our broken bones and heals our deep internal handicaps. The sad part is that many of these "Christian" denominational and institutional franchises have been deceived by the demonic into believing that they (and *only* they themselves) have the right and only way to follow Christ and God! And there is certainly no shortage of carnal "theologians" and Bible "scholars" willing to defend their private deceptions with snide arrogance and brutal vilification of anyone so stupid as to disagree with them!

But let someone be exposed to the original gospel of repentance and initiation into the kingdom of God by way of water and Spirit baptism, let them begin to practice the things Jesus commanded us to do (preach the gospel, lay hands on the sick, etc. – Lk. 9:2, etc.), being surrounded by (or at least in contact with) others who are doing the same and you will quickly see a very different kind of believer – a genuine disciple of Christ and not a passive, idle "church"-ite. Such disciples will not have to overcome the religiosity and fear that those who come out of the "church" struggle against in their attempts to regain their obedience to Christ and God.

It is because the religious "church" system is *designed* to keep us from attaining to spiritual maturity that we must obey Christ and come out of "Babylon." (Rev. 18:4, 2 Cor. 6:17-18, 1 Cor. 5:10-11) The "church" is not the only expression of Babylon, to be sure, but it is the most prevalent and visible in our day and age, if we have spiritual eyes with which to see the otherwise hidden realities. There is great wrath in store for those who persist in remaining in Babylon after having heard His call to come out. (Rev. 16:19) The true way of following Christ is still about carrying our own cross and experiencing death to self there so that we might truly live in the power of the cross of Christ.

It remains true that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor. 1:18) There simply is no salvation in any other name, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) It is true that "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (Rom. 5:10) But if after having been reconciled, we use that reconciliation to return to enmity against Christ and God, great indeed will be our judgment. When Jesus gave the parable of the minas (Lk. 19:12 and following) He said that the citizens of the nobleman (who represents Christ) "hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'" (Lk. 19:14) At the end of the parable, the nobleman, after returning and claiming his kingdom, says, "Bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me." (Lk. 19:27) Of course, the carnal "theologians" and "scholars" will have their spin on this parable by which they relieve us of any responsibility to actually obey Christ and God. But this only shows that they are the victims of Satan's deceptions and that they themselves may be among those whom Christ executes with the second death on the last day! It is never wise to base one's life and eternal destiny on what any human being, especially a

“theologian,” says – Christ’s sheep hear His voice and *He* gives them eternal life as they listen to Him! (Jn. 10:27-28) It is not enough to have faith in a doctrine (a piece of information even when factual) but we must have *Him* and no other! (see 2 Cor. 11:4)

Let us ponder, with great sobriety, the question – how much disobedience can we practice and still be saved? Then let us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phlp. 2:12) lest we be one of those practicers of lawlessness who is dismissed on the last day because we never really interacted with Christ. (Mt. 7:23) Perhaps the greatest tragedy of hell will be that contingent who, for all of endless eternity, will repeatedly hear the Scriptures they knew in their minds but never allowed to spring to life in their hearts. Sad indeed.

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Let he who has ears hear.

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