

WHAT MUST I BELIEVE

PART 1

CAN A PERSON BE MIXED UP, KNOW LITTLE OF THE BIBLE, AND STILL BE SAVED?

“ For I delivered to you first of all that
which I also received: that Christ died
for our sins according to the
Scriptures,”
1 Cor. 15:3 NKJV



Review of Study 5

Salvation is based upon a person being "in Christ." When a person places her or his faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit enters that believer; the believer then has the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Godhead is a Unity, so when the Spirit indwells a person that also means Christ is within him or her. At the same time the Spirit indwells a believer, He also places the believer into Christ. The believer is, therefore, both indwelt by and within Christ, at the same time. The believer becomes one with Him, meaning the believer is completely identified with Christ. His fullness (all that He is and has accomplished) is given to the believer. A believer is a Christ-in-person (He is in the believer, and the believer is in Him).

Introduction

Salvation has always been a personal matter. The word *personal* describes a faith that is private and sincere; it is from the heart (the human spirit). Faith is personal when you believe God loves you, and that you are a sinner for whom Christ died. Salvation is not based upon being a member of a church/group, religious ceremonies, or good works, but upon an individual's faith in Christ. Christ died for everyone, but each of us has to believe what His death means to him or her, that is personal faith. Knowing biblical facts does not save us; we must get beyond facts. Knowing that God exists and that Christ died and rose again are facts; however, saving faith (belief) is based upon understanding how those facts relate to "me," that He died for me! Even Satan knows the facts, but he does not have personal faith (probably not an option for him).

We all need to have clear and precise understanding of the salvation message and should communicate it correctly to others. When we ask unbelievers to place their faith in Jesus Christ, that appeal cannot be ambiguous or encumbered with non-related facts. If the unrelated facts are biblical, but not a requirement for salvation, they will cause confusion and complicate the simplicity of the gospel.

The next two studies will consider just one of many misleading teachings that cause confusion in the salvation message. The teaching considered will serve as an example of how a biblical passage can become misleading when the context of the Scripture is not properly considered and when that passage is placed in a superior position to all other passages. The example will show that using one passage of Scripture (to the exclusion of many others) and ignoring the immediate context of the Scripture, result in a teaching that is off-balance. Any off-balance teaching will create confusion and misunderstanding; neither is helpful for the cause of Christ.

Discuss: A person who is off-balance due to alcohol (or spinning-around) cannot walk a straight line. A person with an off-balance message cannot teach a subject correctly. Discuss.

BIBLE TRUTH

The Off-Balance Teaching

The off-balance teaching we will consider is from 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 (shown below). This is a wonderful passage, and we should believe it in its entirety. However, this powerful passage is used to promote a teaching about salvation that is misleading. The over-emphasis of this one passage, to the exclusion of other Bible verses, causes confusion over *what is good to believe* with *what we must believe to be saved*. There is a huge difference between what is good to believe (at some point in time) and what we must believe *now* to be saved.

First Corinthians 15:1-6 contains some of the most important truths of the Christian faith, such as the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. You may wonder, "How could something that important to Christianity be taught incorrectly?" Many passages of Scripture teach that a person must believe Christ died to forgive her or his sins. However, the misleading teaching states a person *must also believe in the burial and resurrection on the third day* in order to be saved.

Every Christian this author has ever known has believed in the death, burial, and resurrection. However, if we say a person must believe in all three to be saved (DBR belief), we are adding to Scripture and off-balance in our

teaching. Justification, redemption, spiritual baptism, and eternal security are also wonderful truths of the Word, but God does not require belief in them in order to be saved. An unbeliever may not believe many biblical truths, simply because the person is unaware of them; after being saved, he or she will begin to believe them as they mature.

Adult Studies 1-3 revealed how dangerous and misleading it can be to take a phrase out of context. The DBR teaching is based upon a phrase, with disregard for the context, and with a glaring lack of other Scriptural support. Therefore, we must look into this passage more closely. The required belief for salvation should have nothing added to it, or taken from it. The DBR belief is concerned with things that would be good for a person to believe, but salvation does not require a person to believe everything, or even a lot, of the Bible. If that were true, none of us would be saved. The good news is we can be saved even if we have wrong beliefs or are just unaware of many biblical teachings. As an example, it would be nice if everyone believed there was a real flood in Noah's day, but that is not something we absolutely must believe to be saved.

Discuss: Is it comforting to know you do not have to know much of the Bible to be saved?

Analyzing Scripture

The passage in question (1 Cor. 15:1-6) is shown below from the King James Version (the version often used by those who promote the DBR belief). The six verses read:

1. **"MOREOVER, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;"**
2. **"By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain."**
3. **"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;"**
4. **"And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:"**
5. **"And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:"**
6. **"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren all at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."**

In verse 1, Paul starts this epistle by saying, **"MOREOVER, brethren, I declare to you...."** Notice he called those he was addressing as brethren, which means they were fellow believers. This is confirmed a few verses later: **"...so we preach, and so ye believed"** (1 Cor. 15:11). The Corinthians he was addressing were believers, but very mixed up on many things. Paul could not address these people as spiritually mature adults, but had to speak to them as babies because they were so immature and mixed up (1 Cor. 3:1). Paul had to spend considerable time correcting their errors—the content of much of 1 Corinthians—yet they were saved.

—
*A person can be mixed up, have wrong beliefs,
not know much about the Bible, and still be
saved.*
—

In verse 2, Paul starts by saying the Corinthians were saved¹ by the message he preached to them, so salvation is the main topic of this verse. The word *if* (first line) is best translated *since* in modern English. The specific Greek word translated *if* means there was no doubt they would remember (remembering was assumed to be true); thus, *since* is a more correct translation based upon modern word usage. Paul knew they would keep in memory what he taught; that was taken as a fact. However, he purposely exposes a deeper issue: what if his teachings were wrong?

To expose himself in this manner meant Paul had to be confident his teachings were correct. He makes it clear individuals would not be saved if his teachings about Christ were wrong. If Paul were wrong, then their faith was in vain, that is, their faith was of no value. The real question was not whether they would remember what Paul preached, but whether Paul was preaching the truth. If he was giving a false message, then their faith in Christ was in vain (without hope and worthless). Paul then begins to show them, so they would have no doubt, that what he taught was true.

In verse 3, Paul presents the Gospel of our salvation in the purest, simplest form possible, **"that Christ died for our sins."** This phrase is the very basic requirement for salvation, the minimal required belief. This phrase is supported by many other passages in the Bible (discussed later); so we are not taking one phrase out of context or over-emphasizing it. After Paul presents the gospel of our salvation in the simplest terms possible, he says, "according to the scriptures." By saying, "according to the scriptures," he purposely is making it clear his statement about salvation is one complete thought and there was no more to come on how to be saved. This was the gospel of salvation, complete and pure. He ended this complete truth by punctuating it with "according to the scriptures."

¹ In 1 Corinthians 15:2, the term *being saved* is used in many translations. *Being saved* in this verse may refer to the daily experience of God delivering the believer from the bondage of sin in this life, or it may refer to eternal salvation. Either way, the Corinthians to whom Paul was speaking were saved.

Verse 3 is an independent clause, as supported by the use of the ending semicolon.² The punctuation used in any translation is not inspired; but if the KJV is the translation being used, it indicates verse three is an independent clause. The various translations differ in punctuation; the NIV and ESV use a colon after the words "first of all or received" (verse 3), and then all the phrases are separated by commas until the end of verse five. Using the KJV, if the entire passage (verses 3-6) were referring to saving faith, then being seen by Peter, the Twelve, and the 500 are part of the required belief.

Verse 4 begins a new thought. Paul begins to present the fact Christ was buried and rose again on the third day. The topic is no longer how to be saved; now he is providing proof that what he is preaching is the truth. Paul was addressing the troubling question of whether his teachings were correct, so that the people could know if their faith was in vain or not. Again, he ends this verse with "according to the scriptures," which makes this a complete thought.

Paul notes later that some of these saved Corinthians did not believe in the resurrection of the dead: "**Now if**

² The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines a semicolon as, "A mark of punctuation (;) used to connect independent clauses and indicating a closer relationship between the clauses than a period does."

Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:12 KJV). Some of these brethren (fellow believers) did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, not of Christ or any human. From their perspective, this disbelief is easy to understand: who had ever seen or heard of someone coming back to life? These Christians were wrong in what they believed, but still were saved.

Discuss: Considering what was just presented, can there be any clearer proof that a person does not have to believe in the resurrection in order to be saved?

In verses 5 and 6, Paul gives the Corinthians direct proof of the resurrection of the dead, since they were not there to see it; this proof came from the testimony of reliable people with whom they were familiar. Not only did these people witness Christ's resurrection, but most of them were still alive when Paul spoke. The risen Christ was seen by Peter, the Apostles, 500 disciples, and finally Paul (there were even others like Mary Magdalene and James, but they are not mentioned). Paul saw Christ after He had gone to Heaven (when He revealed a special, and previously secret truth to Paul—the Mystery).

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Our Faith Is Not in Vain

The issue of a vain faith is something Paul addressed in many verses: for example, "**And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain**" (1 Cor. 15:14, KJV). If Christ did not rise from the dead, then all Paul was saying about salvation and a resurrected future with Him in Heaven was false; anyone who believed Paul had a worthless faith. The resurrection is very important, not so we can be saved, but as proof that Christ's accomplishments were real and true. The rest of 1 Corinthians 15 is devoted to teaching the truth of the resurrection of Christ and believers (we can have full confidence in this truth).

Salvation Leads to a More Complete Faith

Some Corinthians had wrong beliefs, but later they were presented with the truth. After that, their faith became aligned with the truth. This is what happens with many of us: once we are saved, the Word and Holy Spirit lead us into the truth. However, we do not want to get mixed up and think belief in the resurrection is necessary for salvation.

Your Thoughts: Suppose you came upon a tragic accident and a person was lying there with only a very short time to live. This person had little understanding of

the Bible, but realized they needed to "get right with God." If that person asked you how to be saved, what would you say?

In *Your Thoughts* above, would the person have to believe in the creation, Passover, Mosaic law, rapture, redemption, justification, Christ's death, His burial, and His resurrection? These are all true and some (like justification and redemption) are directly part of our salvation. Clearly, a person does not need to know or believe in all these things to be saved. The simple gospel is this: 1) you are a sinner, 2) the penalty for sin is eternal death, and 3) Christ paid your penalty on the Cross so that your sins could be forgiven. These three points are incorporated in one simple phrase of 1 Corinthians 15:3: "**Christ died for our sins.**" If a person believes this, it is an admission he or she is a sinner, needs forgiveness,

and Christ's death is what provides forgiveness. The other beliefs can come later, as faith grows.

Faith versus Knowledge

It is important to note that God is looking for sincere faith, not absolute doctrinal correctness. We all have doctrinal errors, and God understands that; what He wants is honest faith. If a person honestly believes in Christ's death for her or his sins and believes there are pink elephants flying around in heaven, he or she is still saved. The person is saved because of belief in the truth, even though wrong in other areas.

Discussion: If a person believes both faith in Christ's death and water baptism are required for salvation, are they saved? (Answer: a person's faith in Christ's death for him or her provides salvation; wrong beliefs about baptism do not disqualify a person from being saved.)

TAKE TO HEART

Summary

A clear understanding of the gospel of salvation is important. Some people/groups over-emphasize 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, using it exclusively for the salvation gospel. Such over-emphasis creates a teaching that is off-balance because it is not balanced by other Scripture. Salvation is based solely upon Christ's death on the Cross. It is misleading to teach that a person must also believe in the burial and resurrection as requirements for salvation. The discussion of Christ's resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 was not intended to be a requirement for salvation; it was to prove Paul's message was true. Thus, people could know their faith was not in vain. Using one passage for salvation, to the exclusion of many other Bible verses, has caused confusion between what is good to believe with *what must be believed to be saved*. There are many wonderful truths in the Bible, but God does not require belief in them in order to be saved.

Gospel

The gospel of salvation is, "**For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that *Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures***" (1 Cor. 15:3, italics added). When you believe this, you are aware of sin, the need for deliverance from sin's penalty, and that Christ's death is that deliverance. He paid the price to buy you back (redemption).

Encouragement

Salvation is the most important thing in any person's life; it is acquired by personal faith in Christ. It is encouraging to know our faith in Christ is not in vain, that we do not need to know much to be saved, and that the Holy Spirit will help our faith mature. May the Lord encourage you and lift you up, giving you the confidence to tell others of God's plan of salvation. May God's purpose for your life be clear to you, and may you be empowered by Him to accomplish it.