

WHAT ACTUALLY IS SALVATION?
2 Corinthians 5:17

Intro: Spurgeon said of this text:

This text is exceedingly full of matter, and might require many treatises, and even multitudes of folios, to bring forth all its meaning. Holy Scripture is notably sententious (concise). Human teachers are given to verbiage; we multiply words to express our meaning, but the Lord is wondrously laconic (sparing of words, terse, brief); he writeth as it were in shorthand, and gives us much in little. One single grain of the precious gold of Scripture may be beaten out into acres of human gold leaf, and spread far and wide. A few books are precious as silver, fewer still are golden; but God's Book hath a bank note in every syllable, and the worth of its sentences ~~is~~ ^{is} were not possible for mortal intellects to calculate (Metro. Tab. Pulpit, Vol. 15, p. 397).

There are three distinct parts to this verse:

- 1) "Therefore if any man be in Christ,
- 2) "He is a new creature:
- 3) "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

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Some might divide the last two statements, but they seem to belong to each other in explaining the ~~first two~~ ^{second} statements.

In these days when there are so many superficial and meaningless "decisions for Christ" as evidenced by the fact that they do not remain, it is important for us to know WHAT ACTUALLY SALVATION IS! Is it going forward in a meaning, signing a card, telling someone that we will accept Christ, or is it possible to do all of these things including being baptized and joining a church, and yet not be saved?

The answer is, Yes, it is possible to do all of these things and still not be a Christian. A Christian may do them, but that is not what has made him a Christian.

In this verse, how did Paul describe salvation? Or, to state it another way, how did he describe what it means to be a Christian?

I. SALVATION MEANS TO BE "IN CHRIST."

Even the words sound strange, do they not? People do not normally talk that way. That is the language of the Bible. What does it mean? And how do you get there?

Spurgeon, whom I quoted to begin my message, also had this to say about being "in Christ":

There are three stages of the human soul in connection with Christ: the first is without Christ, this is the state of nature; the next is in Christ, this is the state of grace; the third is with Christ, that is the state of glory (Ibid.).

Paul spoke of the first one in Eph. 2:11, 12. This is the state of all men originally. Those who are "without Christ" are actually "in Adam." Cf. 1 Cor. 15:22.

There is probably no more important expression in the Bible than this: "in Christ." This is what salvation is. No matter how many cards you may sign, or how many invitations you respond to, you are not a Christian until you are in Christ.

How do we get "in Christ"? Is it something we do? How can it be something we do when we have to confess even as Christians that we do not really understand all that it means?

Getting into Christ is a work of God, not something that we do for ourselves.

Cf. Rom. 6:3, 4. Paul was speaking here about the possibility of continuing in sin, and to show the impossibility of it he pointed the Roman Christians back to what it means to be saved. It means being put into Christ! Only God can do that for us, and He does it by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus illustrated this great truth by speaking of the vine and the branches. A Christian is one who is in Christ in the same way that a branch has been joined to the vine. The life of the branch comes from the vine.

Further, to be in Christ means that God accepts all that Christ is and all that Christ has done in our behalf. His righteousness is our righteousness. Our standing before God is perfect because Christ's standing before God is perfect. It is "in Christ" that "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin" (Col. 1:14).

Read Ephesians and Colossians if you want to understand what it means to be "in Christ."

But look at the second part;

II. SALVATION MEANS THAT WE ARE NEW CREATURES.

Perhaps a better translation would be, it is a new creation,

or "he is a new creation" (NIV).

This statement tells us two things:

- A. Salvation is the work of God as Creator just as much as original creation was the work of God.
- B. Salvation is not the old worked over and renovated, but it is something entirely new and different.

The word that Paul used here (καινός) means something new in quality, a new kind, something unprecedented, novel, unheard of before God did it.

This is something that never entered into the heart of man. What does the psychologist or the psychiatrist do when a person goes in for help? He asks all kinds of questions about that person's past, his parents, his experiences. And why does he do this? Because he has to find out what he has to work with.

God knows that that is not enough! He knows that a new work of creation is needed, something different, something holy, something of God Himself. He knows that what we need is Christ. We need to be in Him, and, if we are, we are new creatures.

How tragic it is that in our day the Biblical term "born again" has been subjected to such ridicule by the sinfulness of men who claim to be Christians! There is no more important truth in Scripture. Men and women and boys and girls do need to be born again, but when they are they are "new," and they can never be like they were before.

Our first two statements you can see are related to each other. The person who is "in Christ" is "a new creature." He is different from what he used to be.

Now in the last statement we see the result.

III. SALVATION MEANS BEING CHANGED SO THAT THAT PERSON CAN NEVER GO BACK AND BE LIKE HE WAS BEFORE.

Many professing Christians do go back, and stay back in their former lives, but that is because they only profess Christ. They really do not know Him.

"Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Does this mean that a Christian can no longer sin? No, it

does not mean that. Does it mean that a Christian will always do the right thing, that he will never make mistakes? No, it does not mean that. What does it mean? It means that he is a different person.

I heard of a person who had just been saved, and one of his friends said to him, "You are different from the way you used to be, and I liked the way you were before more than the way you are now." Of course that would be true. The person objecting was not a Christian.

A Christian talks differently. He no longer enjoys what he used to enjoy. He cannot even listen to dirty remarks and feel comfortable about it. The old crowd does not give him the pleasure that it used to. He enjoys reading the Bible, and going to church. He is more concerned about pleasing God than he is about pleasing himself, or pleasing other people. He is no longer what he was. Even his thoughts and ambitions and purposes in life have undergone a complete change. They are different because he is different.

And the important thing is that this will continue. He may fall into sin, but he cannot live in sin. He will persevere in the faith.

Concl: Does this fit your definition of salvation? This is the true definition, not because it is mine, but because it is what the Word of God says.

But somebody says, "I know a Christian, and he is not like that. In fact, when he is with the people of the world he can act like they do, and enjoy what they enjoy, and yet when he is with Christians he seems to fit right in with them." What is the problem?

It may be that that person has never been changed within. He may never have been made a new creation. For him the "old things" are still the only things; there may be no "new" things in his life.

It behooves each one of us to ask ourselves the question, Are there the true evidences in my life that I am "in Christ." If the Biblical passages which describe a child of God do not describe us, then perhaps we need to seek the mercy of God upon our own hearts, that we might be made anew by the power of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This matter is of eternal consequences, and therefore it is far too important for us to be mistaken about our own relationship to God.