

What Does It Mean to be Saved?

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Recently, an article appeared in one of our leading church missionary periodicals which stated that we do not obey God's law, or have any desire to do so, until after we are saved. In a two-page article, the reader is told:

"True obedience requires a change of heart . . . but this attitude comes only from a person who has already been saved."

"Once a person has been saved, then the law performs an important function in his life: It points out the sins he or she needs to overcome . . . A person has to be saved in order to keep the law."

"God's plan is for us to turn from our sins and do good works. So He saves us first, which provides us with the desire and the power to obey."

"Jesus Himself said, 'If you love Me, keep My Commandments.' Genuine Christians also understand that obedience is a loving response by people who've *been* saved, not the basis on which they are saved." [italics his]

A number of believers are concerned, because the article was written by one of our best evangelists who is truly a fine person with a fairly good understanding of the truth.

The difficulty here revolves around the correct definition of "saved." Over the years, many of our people have been confused on this point. I recall, almost fifty years ago while in attendance at our Seminary in Washington, D.C., one of the students (a minister on furlough) commented that he did not like that statement in *Christ's Object Lessons*, that we were never to think or say we are saved. To my astonishment, the teacher replied, "I am very sorry that statement is there." Whether or not he recognized it, he was saying that the Spirit of Prophecy was in error.

Due to erroneous views of Protestants and incorrectly translated Bible passages, it is commonly held in Christendom that, at the time of a momentary profession of conversion, we suddenly become "saved"; that is, at that time we enter into a state of salvation.

There are three variations of this concept: Some churches teach that we can fall from that state back into sin while others teach "once saved, always saved," regardless of our later conduct. Still others teach predestination: Prior to our being born, God arbitrarily chose to save some of us and condemn others to eternal hellfire.

Our only safety is in remaining close to the Inspired Writings. Because it covers such matters in

far closer detail than does the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy provides us with an outstanding guide to help us solve all such matters.

A powerful evidence of the divine inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy is the fact that Ellen White was so selective and accurate in her choice of words. Although writing over a lengthy period of time on one topic and then another, when she returned to a certain subject, she would consistently use certain words to mean certain things. An example of this is her use of the word "confederacy." It is always used in only one sense.

Two other words which she used in a very exacting manner are "saved" and "redeemed."

Never, in the Spirit of Prophecy, is anyone "saved" until death or translation! Never in those writings, is anyone said to be "redeemed" while living in this present life on earth. Although you and I can cooperate with Heaven in working toward ultimate salvation, we are not now "saved."

We can now be converted and live a Christian life, but not yet are we saved. Indeed, we are never to think we are saved. As we cling to Jesus every day and, by His enabling grace obey His Word, we are in a process of being saved. But, in the correct theological sense of the word, we are not "saved."

Why is such a careful distinction needed? Why does she warn us not to say or think that we are now saved?

The answer is simple enough: People apply the word, saved, in its primary meaning of a process completed; and it is normal to expect that they would do so—for that is the meaning of the word. They assume that a person who is "saved" can henceforth relax; for his ticket to heaven is assured. But in this life, fraught with continual dangers and temptations, we dare not make such an assumption.

A simple illustration may help illustrate the use of the word: The people standing on the Titanic could not say they were saved. Those in the water knew they were not saved. Those in the lifeboats, along with others who climbed in, did not think they were saved. Unless further actions were taken, they would eventually freeze to death that winter evening in the North Atlantic, or die of thirst or hunger. Not until they were hauled on board a large ship, could they safely say that they had been saved.

People out in the world are like those on the Titanic. Although some may realize they will perish

if they do not receive help, most do not realize their danger. Christians can be likened to those in small lifeboats on the Atlantic. They face many perils, which only heaven can help them through; and some will be lost at sea, not choosing to remain close to Christ. Not until they are lifted on board the ship can they safely declare that they are saved.

We are not saved as long as we can still be lost! We dare not say today that we are saved, if tomorrow we must once again fight the fight of faith to remain Christ's humble, believing, obedient children. We cannot relax our efforts or our determination. And we dare not copy the theological wording used by the other churches. We must remain with the concepts given us in the Bible and clarified by the Spirit of Prophecy.

"Peter's fall was not instantaneous, but gradual. Self-confidence led him to the belief that he was saved, and step after step was taken in the downward path, until he could deny his Master. Never can we safely put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we are secure against temptation. **Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading.** Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation. God's Word declares, 'Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.' Dan. 12:10. Only he who endures the trial will receive the crown of life (James 1:12).

"Those who accept Christ, and in their first confidence say, I am saved, are in danger of trusting to themselves. They lose sight of their own weakness and their constant need of divine strength. They are unprepared for Satan's devices, and under temptation many, like Peter, fall into the very depths of sin. We are admonished, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.' 1 Cor. 10:12. Our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, 155.

"We are never to rest in a satisfied condition, and cease to make advancement, saying, 'I am saved.' When this idea is entertained, the motives for watchfulness, for prayers, for earnest endeavor to press onward to higher attainments, cease to exist. **No sanctified tongue will be found uttering these words till Christ shall come, and we enter in through the gates into the city of God.** Then, with the utmost propriety, we may give glory to God and to the Lamb for eternal deliverance. **As long as man is full of weakness—for of himself he cannot save his soul—he should never dare to say, 'I am saved.'**

"It is not he that putteth on the armor that can boast of the victory; for he has the battle to fight

and victory to win. It is he that endureth unto the end that shall be saved. The Lord says, 'If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him' (Heb. 10:38). If we do not go forward from victory to victory, the soul will draw back to perdition."—*1 Selected Messages*, 314-315.

"Saved" is a verb and relates to "Salvation," a noun. We do not have salvation until Christ returns. Not until then are we "the saved."

"Saved" means to be "redeemed." "Redeem," "redeemed," and "redemption" are related in the same manner.

We are now in the redemption process, but we do not now have redemption. The Spirit of Prophecy never refers to God's faithful children on earth by the term, "the redeemed." It is only after Christ returns for His own that the term is applied. Only then are they "the redeemed." If you will open the *3 Spirit of Prophecy Index* to pp. 2235-2238, you will find nearly 200 entries to the "redeemed," containing a couple thousand references. Yet each and every one is talking about people and events from the Second Advent and onward. Only then are we "the saved"; only then are we "the redeemed."

When you stop to think about it, the idea that people can be saved merely by professing the name of Christ at an evangelistic meeting belittles the plan of salvation. That beautiful plan, conceived from eternity past and costing the life of our Lord and Saviour, calls for the complete restoration of man to perfect obedience to the law of God, complete restoration to the likeness of the character of God. That is the plan—the plan of redemption, the plan of salvation—as described in the Bible and clarified in the Spirit of Prophecy. "Being saved" is not merely a matter of accepting Christ and then, with no necessity of continual sacrifice, obedience and labor for souls, to just sit back and enjoy the pleasures of earth while awaiting a call home to heaven.

This life is dangerous! Through the empowering merits of Christ's aid, we must resist the world, the flesh, and the devil. We dare not slacken our efforts, and we must not pause and sit on the sidelines of battle for a time, lest we be overcome.

We can now only begin to grasp the immensity of what was involved in the redemption plan; it will be our study throughout eternal ages.

"Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss."—*Desire of Ages*, 131.