

There's More To It Than That

It's interesting to me how an illustration can sometimes become so powerful that it supplants the thing it is illustrating. For instance, the illustration for salvation is many times cited by the use of a man's five fingers. Hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized, we are wont to affirm, is God's plan for salvation. And it is. But that's not some sort of creed. It's an illustration—a representative of what happens when an honest person—a sinner—seeking salvation from his sins, reads the Bible and sees what God affirms as the necessary steps to salvation. But let it be carefully observed that:

Sin is more than a mere mismanagement of one's life. Sin is a willful choice, made by a rational human being, but one that is in direct contradiction to what God defines as truth and goodness. A person sins when he deliberately chooses his own way in preference to God's way (Jeremiah 10:23; Isaiah. 55:8-9). Sin is a disdain for God and His law. In Psalm 51, David affirms, "against Thee and The only have I sinned." All sin is against God. In II Corinthians 5:21, Paul affirms that Christ was "made to be sin" for us. And in Isaiah 53:4-6, we are informed that the death of Jesus was necessary for our forgiveness. Sin is not just mis-managing one's life, but a serious reproach against God.

Faith is more than a mere admission that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Faith that doesn't act on known knowledge is no faith at all (James. 2:22). Faith is active. The Hebrew writer says that in order to please God one must not only believe who He is, but "that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (11:6). It is not enough to merely love God, either. "He that saith I know Him and keepeth not His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him (I John 1:4). Love for God is perfected in our obedience. Faith that works is faith that saves.

Repentance is more than just one decision to turn and serve God. Salvation is not, and never has been, a one-stroke process; and repentance is not a one-time decision. John tells us that we should "bring forth therefore fruit meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8). That's a continual process, a willful decision to do better day by day. Repentance activates one's faithfulness. One who repents will then turn. There is no repentance without turning and no turning without repentance. One implies the other. One who has repented will begin immediately to turn himself around (see Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19).

Confession is more than an admission that Jesus was a historical character. Confession is an audible admission of what is in one's heart. I cannot know for sure what you believe—no matter how I may suspect it—until you tell me. Confession, to the Christian, is a kind of pledge of allegiance. The Ethiopian, in Acts 8, confessed that he now believed in Jesus Christ. And it's not just a mantra or creedal admission, but a real statement of acquiescence and resolve to God as Sovereign. Confession states publically who we serve.

Baptism is more than just getting saved. No good Bible student would deny that baptism saves (Acts 22:16), being "born again" (John 3:3; 3:5) is just that—being born. Following your birth there must be a willing decision to develop toward spiritual maturity. "If ye then be risen with Christ," says Paul, "seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." That's the course of pursuit which naturally follows baptism (being "risen with Christ"). That maturation process is one that must be diligently pursued: it's putting on the "new man" and putting off the "old man" (Col. 3:10, 12, 14).

Judgment is more than a slapping of the hand. Judgment is serious business. It is an appointment every man will keep and should be a horrible thought to those not prepared for it. "Behold, therefore the goodness and severity of God; on them that fell severity..." (Romans 11:22). Matthew 25:31-46 records the judgment scene. Several things stand out: First, please note that everyone will be there (vs. 32). Second, please observe that there will be a separation of the good and evil (vs. 33). Third, notice, please, that some will be sent into everlasting punishment (vs. 41). And fourth, rejoice that the knowledge that there will be a glorious reward for the faithful (vs. 34). "It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Can we dare ignore the fact of impending judgment? And it could be sooner than you think.

Yes, let us allow the Bible to speak for what constitutes salvation. And let us be careful not to make the illustration of the salvation the salvation itself.

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