

Reading the Word “Saved” (Revised 9/09)

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When we read or study, knowing the accurate meaning of words is necessary to an accurate understanding. This is true in any field of study. When a student learns math, he must know the definition or meaning of the numbers. If the number 2 isn't defined then the equation $2+3= ?$ is indeterminable. $2+3$ might equal 6, 7, 8 or who knows! When we study the Bible the definition of the terms we read is just as essential.

Distinguishing the Meanings Used

The word “save”¹ or its various forms (e.g. salvation, savior, saved) is one of many words used in the Bible which can be misunderstood. This is a very important word to New Testament Believers. Like many words, this word has different emphases and meanings, depending upon the context in which it is found. When Israel stood at the Red Sea, fearing the army of the Egyptians, Moses told them to stand, “and see the salvation of Jehovah” (Exodus 14:13, cf. 30). The Hebrew word יְשׁוּעָה [*yeshuah*] is here translated “salvation.” God brought Israel through the sea on dry land and then drowned the Egyptian army in the same sea when they attempted to pursue the Israelites. This same phrase is found in 2 Chronicles 20:17, when the sons of Moab and Ammon attempted to make war against Judah. But God routed them (22-24). In both instances, “salvation” refers to physical deliverance from harm. God saved His people from being killed by armies. The idea of physical deliverance is al-

most the universal meaning for this Hebrew word family in the Old Testament.

Our understanding of spiritual salvation is not commonly found in the Hebrew word *yeshuah* [יְשׁוּעָה- save] or its variant forms. For example, we read this word in Psalm 3:8, “salvation belongs to the Lord.” The context is when David was fleeing from Absalom. In that context, David meant physical deliverance (cp 2, 6, 7). He was not speaking of spiritual salvation from his sins. Endowing this word with the concept of spiritual salvation is not literal interpretation and only mislead us regarding what God meant. It will also distract us from what God has to say about spiritual salvation. Though rare, the word *yesha* [יָשַׁע] has the meaning of spiritual salvation in some contexts. David used it in Psalm 51:12, 14. David had committed adultery with Bethsheba and arranged her husband's death. After being charged with guilt by Nathan the prophet, David begged God not to cast him away from His presence. God had rejected Saul, and David feared the same. David was able to approach the tabernacle which was near to his house, and he feared he would no longer be able to do so. He did not ask to have salvation restored, for he had not lost salvation, but he had lost the joy [*shashon*] which was part of that salvation. In Psalm 32:1-3 David wrote of this joy, “Happy² is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy is the man to whom the Jehovah does not count perversity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” This is spiritual salvation. Therefore, we must discern whether the emphasis is spiritual or physical deliverance when we read this word.

The idea of physical deliverance also occurs with the New Testament word *sodzo* and its many forms. The intended meaning must be de-

¹ Two dominant word families are represented by the family of English words related to “save.” The Hebrew יָשַׁע [*yasha*] and the Greek σωζω [*sodzo*].

² David employed the Hebrew word אֲשֵׁרָה [*asherah*] which derives from אֲשֵׁר [*esher*], the latter meaning happiness or bliss, for which see *The Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*. Additionally, Paul quotes David and translates this word by the Greek μακαριος which does mean happiness.

terminated by context. In Acts 27:20 we find a ship load of people having given up hope of surviving a storm. In that context, “save” referred to physical survival. Paul informed them, that if they jumped overboard and didn’t remain in the boat they wouldn’t be saved (31). This was physical deliverance from drowning. This usage can be found in several passages (see, Matthew 8:25; 10:22; 16:25; 24:13, 22; Philippians 1:19; 1 Timothy 2:15; et al).

Distinguishing the meaning of “save” in its various contexts is important. Failure to do so causes unnecessary problems for believers. Many Christians have been beaten over the head with Matthew 24:13, “but whoever endures to the end, shall be saved.” Taken out of its context, believers are told they must persevere or really continue being good to the end if they wish to be saved. In the context, Jesus promised physical deliverance from the Tribulation for those believing Jews who would survive to the end. Many people will be martyred during that time. Those who do survive to the end will not then be killed. Rather God’s angels will gather His elect from the four corners of the earth. They will be physically delivered (31). *Sodzo* is also used of physical healing in several passages (Matthew 9:21, 22; Mark 5:23; 6:56; Luke 17:19; Acts 4:9; James 5:15 et al). These are in addition to many New Testament passages which refer to spiritual salvation. We must discern the meaning of this word when we read and study.

Distinguishing the Time: Past, Present, Future

The Bible student must also distinguish the time to which *sodzo* refers. When we read the word “salvation,” we need to discover by context whether it is referring to something which happened in the past, something which is on-going, or something which has yet to take place. Simply, our salvation exists in three tenses or at three different times. I can say that I was saved in the past, I am being saved in the present, and I will be saved in the future. The failure to understand this distinction regarding time has caused many problems for believers. Many have inaccurately

limited this distinction by the words justification, sanctification and glorification. These words also have different tenses, and therefore, I find them inadequate to indicate time.

Having been beaten, imprisoned and placed in stocks, Paul and Silas worshipped God aloud (Acts 16:24-25). When the earthquake opened the doors of the prison and the bonds of the prisoners, yet none escaped, the jailer thought Paul and Silas were gods [A.V. “sirs” is literally “lords”] (30). He asked them, “What is necessary for me to be saved?” In the context, the jailer desired to know what would cause his physical deliverance from punishment. In the Roman world, if a prisoner escaped (none had yet), the soldier entrusted with guarding him would have received the prisoner’s punishment. Paul turned the word “saved” from physical deliverance to spiritual deliverance. Paul told the jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” Paul and Silas were not gods and could not save him, but the Lord - the God (32, 34b) could, in response to faith. In this instance, Paul used “saved” to refer to what we know as past tense or initial salvation. Many times throughout the New Testament, “save” is used with the meaning of initial salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5). Paul also used it in 1 Corinthians **15:2-4** where he explained that the Corinthians were saved by believing the Gospel, which he then clearly reviewed in verses 3 and 4. For many Christians, this is about the only meaning they know for the word “save.” They read this into most if not all occurrences of “save”. However the word “save” is also used with reference to God’s present and the future work with/for believers.

The following lists are not inclusive of all texts using the word “save” but give a good representation of Present Tense: Acts 15:1, 11; 2 Corinthians 1:6; 7:10; Philippians 2:12; 1 Timothy 4:16; Hebrews 7:25; James 1:21; 2:14; 1 Peter 3:21; 4:18; Jude 3; of Future Tense: Romans 5:9, 10; 13:11; 1 Corinthians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:8, 9; 2 Timothy 4:18; 1 Peter 1:9, 10. These

texts are very important when understood in their proper time frame.

Some Practical Benefits from Understanding Present Tense Salvation

In Acts 15:1 and 11 “saved” refers to present tense salvation. The issue of the Jerusalem council was not how Gentiles should become believers, in which case “save” meant initial or past tense salvation. Most Bible students interpret this passage in that light. However, the question involved how the Gentile converts should live once they were initially saved. Therefore, “saved” is used with the meaning of growth, maturity, or Christian living. This is Present Tense salvation. Verse 11 is very important because as Peter listened to Paul’s message. He realized that the manner of life Paul had been teaching the Gentile believers, namely grace versus law, would be the same manner by which the Jewish believers would soon begin to live. If we understand the word “save” to mean initial salvation, then Peter’s statement means that at that time the Jews had to be circumcised to be saved, and they were not saved by faith alone. I’m not aware of any Bible students who interpret Peter to mean this, yet they fail to take his statement back in the context and apply it to the question. The issue was one of the Gentile believer’s conduct or daily living. They were trying to determine under what circumstances the present tense salvation of Gentiles was to take place. Additionally, Peter advised not to place a heavy burden on the disciples. He considered them believers. Initial salvation was never the question in Acts 15, how one lives was the issue.

Paul instructed the Philippians to work out or render their Present Tense of Salvation (2:12). Every believer has the responsibility to allow God to mature Him. As Paul wrote the Hebrews, “Let us be borne [or carried]³ unto maturity”

(6:1). God does not force believers to grow. He provides all that is necessary for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3): the life, the strength, the nature, the Holy Spirit, etc. but it is the individual’s responsibility to work that out, to use what God has provided. In this light Paul reminded the Philippians that even in working out their salvation, it is God who both energizes them, and brings about the desires in them to grow (v. 13).⁴ Part of this growth would involve doing all things without the grumblings and arguments (v. 14). If they functioned in this way, they would be children at whom no one can point a finger; children who shine like little stars; children who not only talk about the word of life but hold it up by their very lives (v. 15-16). Paul’s reference to working out “salvation” is not one of works salvation but of growing in that salvation.

Water baptism saves no one in the Past. Initial salvation is by grace through faith-**alone!** Cornelius and his household were saved before they were water baptized (Acts 10:46-47). Since water baptism testifies outwardly to the baptism by the Holy Spirit into Christ, the believer should make this testimony. Thus, Peter wrote that baptism saves only with regard to our conscience (1 Peter 3:21). It can’t wash away the filth of the flesh-the sin nature. It doesn’t remove the problem of the flesh. Our behavior should match our knowledge. If we know we should testify to our union in the Body of Christ and do not, we potentially can have a conscience problem. Therefore, Peter used “save” to speak of growth or Christian living, not initial salvation.

Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus where the church once had many elders pastoring. Yet the Ephesian church had been affected by law-teachers who misapplied the law to Grace believers (1 Timothy 1:7ff). Timothy was to correct the problems largely dealing with the misapplied Old

³ The writer of Hebrews used a passive voice of the verb φέρω - “to carry.” The passive voice means that they do not carry themselves, but allow another to carry them.

⁴ It is interesting that God provides both the desire for the good work as well as the inside work to accomplish it. The believer, in reality, provides only the choice. The believer chooses to fulfill the desire God has placed in him. When he does so, it is God who accomplishes the work (cf. John 3:21 “his works are worked by God”).

Testament doctrine [*didaskalia*] and its effects upon believers' conduct. Therefore, Paul wrote Timothy to pay attention to himself, referring to his conduct, and to Old Testament doctrine [*didaskalia*; 4:11-16]. Timothy was to be an example [Greek *tupos*, 4:12] of proper New Testament doctrine in action and at the same time, see that the Old Testament doctrines were taught accurately and not applied to the Grace believer. By doing this, Timothy would both save himself and those listening to his teaching (4:16). Neither Timothy nor the Ephesians saints need to be saved in the past, but they did need to go on growing or maturing. Paul was writing about daily living, not initial salvation. In verse 12 we find "word, conduct, love, faith, and purity" all of which are areas of daily living. When Old Testament doctrine is applied to the Grace believer as a standard or guide for his daily life, it will conflict with these five areas as expressed in New Testament revelation. By teaching accurately and making certain that others also did, Timothy could securing the grounds of growth.

Reading the Word Saved - continued

In the last article we considered the necessity of distinguishing the emphases of the words for salvation, i.e. spiritual, physical deliverance, healing. We also pointed out the need to distinguish between the point of time to which the words refer, i.e. past, present or future. We are studying texts which refer to present tense salvation which we might also call growth or maturity.

One of the most frequently misunderstood passages due to an inaccurate or perhaps incomplete understanding of the word “save” is James 2:14, “My brothers, what *is* the profit, if anyone says He has faith but he does not have works? Is that faith able to save him?” This passage is sometimes interpreted to mean that a believer is saved by a combination of works and faith, or a faith which must be followed by

works. A common evangelical interpretation is represented by Bruce Demarest, “Saving faith, finally, must include wholehearted *trust* and *commitment* to Christ, evidenced by obedience and good works.”⁵ Therefore, these evangelicals avoid teaching salvation by works by using such language as, “James opposed the view, held by certain Christians, that assent to truths can stand alone, i.e., without being validated by good works.”⁶ Kevin Keathley agrees, “This obedient, saving faith in Christ is manifest by our faithful obedience to his other commands. A faith that does not produce good works is not a saving faith at all.”⁷ While this appears to contradict Paul, Alister McGrath summarized his brief discussion of

the James two passage, “Paul and James merely state in different ways, and with different emphases, the basic meaning of the doctrine of justification by faith: we are graciously offered our salvation as a gift, which we receive by faith, and which transforms our natures (Rom. 12:20; 2 Cor. 3:18) so that good works result.”⁸ Each of these writers would agree that salvation is by faith, but each also contends that the result of that faith is good works.

A reading of the New Testament would demonstrate that it is generally true, God changes people by means of salvation. The lives of the Thessalonian believers were so radically changed that Paul’s message had echoed out through a large region (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10; cf Romans 1:8). Salvation does involve God beginning a good work and continuing that work up to the day when God finishes it (Philippians 1:6).

It is also true, that nearly every letter written in the New Testament was written in response to problems in local churches. Some of those problems were significant. Some of those problems involved gross immorality, major failures, intense infighting, dissension and even opposition to Paul. To the Galatians Paul wrote, “how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?” (4:9). Where were the good works of these believers? Were these people, whom Paul identified as saints and beloved, indeed saved, or had they only given mental assent to facts?

James was writing to those whom he considered brothers. He posed a question to them about themselves. It was not a question of whether they are saved. It was a question of whether they could go on being saved, that is, whether they could grow when they failed to act upon their faith. By misunderstanding James,

⁵ Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997) p. 260.

⁶ *ibid*, p. 261.

⁷ Kenneth Keathley, *The Work of God: Salvation in A Theology for the Church* ed. Daniel L. Akins, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007) pp. 737-738.

⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) p. 374.

some have placed him in opposition to Paul, Yet Paul wrote, “The righteous one will live by faith.” (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). This is what James meant, “live from faith” not “get saved by faith.”

“The righteous will live by faith” is quoted from Habakkuk 2:4. Habakkuk was a righteous man. He was burdened by the injustice and violence among his own people (Habakkuk 1:3-4). In response, God promised to bring the even more violent Chaldeans (from Babylon) against Judah (Habakkuk 1:5-6). On this background, surrounded by violence and with the prospect of God’s judgment, the righteous one had to go one living by faith rather than losing heart. If one lived by faith, God promised, “The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s, and He will make me walk on my high hills” (Habakkuk 3:19). Habakkuk was describing the attitude of faith of an Old Testament believer, a righteous one, not the faith of one coming to initial salvation.

If we understand that James 2:14 refers to initial salvation by faith, we make this a works salvation text. If that is the intended meaning, then James was stating that one must have works to accompany his initial act of faith.⁹ We have sufficient plain Scriptures that salvation is apart from works (e.g. Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, if James was writing about the same issue addressed in plain Scriptures, then Scripture

contradicts itself. It is better to understand that James was writing about a different issue.

Faith can refer to the act at the point of initial salvation.¹⁰ Faith can also refer to an attitude which is part of the fruit from the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). This attitude of faith involves repeated acts of faith exercised in our daily lives. When we read the word faith in Scripture, it is necessary to discern whether the writer meant an initial act or an act as part of the Christian life.¹¹ Both are faith, but the purpose and results of each are different.

James was referring to faith as part of Abraham’s life following his salvation. James cited an act from faith in Abraham’s life which occurred approximately 24-30 years after God had declared him righteous (2:21). Abraham obeyed God and went about to offer his son Isaac. That act from faith did not justify Abraham initially.

This also demonstrates that the word “justify” or “justification” as used in James 2 can have different points of emphasis regarding time. Paul wrote in Romans 3:28, “for we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from law works.” This is absolutely the opposite of what James wrote, unless we understand that the point of time reference is different. That Abraham was counted righteous on the basis of faith is stated four times (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). James’ was not referring to Abraham’s initial salvation but to the life Abra-

⁹ It is also true that once an individual believes the gospel, he is saved. He does not have to re-believe the gospel. He did it once for all. He is saved. If we make this a repeated act of faith, then there is no certainty of salvation, and John’s words are inaccurate, “I have written that you might know you have eternal life” (1 John 5:14). This is not to imply that a person who claimed to have believed the gospel, and later claims that they no longer believe it is saved. Genuine faith in the saving work of Christ results in a state of salvation. Ephesians 2:8 indicates this by the use of Perfect periphrastic, a grammatical device that emphasizes the abiding result of faith. In other words, one who has believed will never deny salvation by faith in the gospel.

¹⁰ This act of faith precedes regeneration according to Scripture.

¹¹ Thomas Schriener in his *New Testament Theology* fails to distinguish between these two types of faith. “Paul does not understand faith to be a momentary feeling that vanishes. Saving faith is a persevering faith. Those who “received” (*paralambanō*) the message of the gospel belong to God (1 Cor. 15:1-2), but they have believed “in vain” if they do not continue to cling to the faith that they embraced” The Greek word for “vain” is *eike* and means they believed with no purpose or goal. It does not mean they fail to continue clinging. In the same paragraph, Schriener goes on, “Faith alone saves (cf. 1 Tim. 1:16), but genuine faith produces fruit and leads to a change in one’s life. Paul speaks of a “work of faith” (1 Thess. 1:3), and here “of faith” (*pisteōs*) should be understood as a genitive of source.” I would contend that the work from faith, is not faith in the initial gospel, but faith in a promise of God regarding service among saints and the faith is part of the fruit from the Spirit.

ham lived after he became a believer. In fact the work James pointed to was a work of faith during Abraham's life according to Hebrews 11:17-19, were we find a listing of acts from faith by many people. Paul went on to write that if Abraham were justified by works, then he would have something concerning which he could boast (Romans 4:2). Therefore, the word "justify" must have a different emphasis in James. This is similar to Paul's point in Galatians 5:4, in which he addressed believers, who had been made free, who had run well but were later tripped up and were seeking present tense justification by keeping the Law. Rather than obedience to the Law to declare us righteous, Paul stated, "for we by *the* Spirit eagerly expect a hope consisting of righteousness coming from faith." (Galatians 5:5). This is a promise, that by the work of the Spirit, we can actually live righteously. This promise is the basis of a hope in which the individual believer places faith.

By misusing James two, many Christians have been caused to doubt their legitimate salvation due to a lack of identifiable good works. When evangelizing one who thinks he needs to do good works, we sometimes ask how many good works is enough? We could ask the same question here, how many good works are necessary to demonstrate that one's faith was genuine? However, James was encouraging believers, that if they desired to grow, to mature, to experience present tense salvation, claiming to have faith was not sufficient. They needed to allow that faith to produce works. Therefore, when James asked, "can that faith save," that is faith that has no works, he did not mean save from condemnation in the lake of fire, or saved from our sins. James meant present tense salvation, or growth.

Frequently faith is tied to love, as operating together (cf. Galatians 5:6). In the context of James, such works from love would involve the proving of their faith through temptation (1:3, 6); not showing favoritism to the rich over the poor in the assembly (2:1, 5) and therefore caring for the widows and orphans (2:27), and providing for

the brother or sister who is destitute and in need of food or clothing. This is the very issue James is addressing. God is presenting the genuine believer with an opportunity to love a fellow believer as an act from faith. If a believer doesn't act on his faith, and does not meet the need, that believer will remain at that point of immaturity and can not grow. Growth comes by acting upon faith in God's present promises.

Numerous Scriptures indicate that all one must do to be saved is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that He died for one's sins, was buried, rose again, and appeared to many (Acts 16:31; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5). So, we read Romans 10:9-10 "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." Does this passage add an additional requirement for initial salvation? Must one not only believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but also verbally confess Him? If one must confess Him, then to whom or before whom must one confess Him: before a church congregation, before an unsaved crowd, to one person, ten? You see the dilemma.

The larger issue in Romans is the stability of believers. That stability is found by understanding our lost condition (chapters 1-3), by understanding that one's status at the moment of initial faith contributes nothing to one's salvation (chapter 4), by understanding the inability of the sin nature to cut off the believer's access to God (chapters 5-8). Chapter eight ends with the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. This raises the questions, "What about Israel? Aren't they separate from God's love?" In chapters nine through eleven Paul answers this question, assuring His readers that Israel is beloved (Romans 11:28).

However, the larger issue remains the believer's stability. One deterrent to stability results from the believer attempting to live by law, especially Mosaic Law. It is a problem because the

believer will always fail, and failure breeds fear of punishment (Romans 7). Therefore, Paul is also attempting to dissuade the Roman believers from living by the Law. Paul testified that Israel was zealous for God, but they didn't have the knowledge for a proper zeal (Romans 10:2). They didn't know God's righteousness, they didn't know that it is so far above man's righteousness that man's obedience to law will not produce God's righteousness (Romans 10:3). So, Israel attempted to establish their own righteousness. Christ is now the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe (Romans 10:4). This is not about initial salvation. The Law was never about initial salvation. The law was about a standard of righteousness which allowed Israel to have God in the midst of their nation (made up of saved and unsaved), and allowed individuals access to God at the Tabernacle and later the Temple. So, when Christ ended the Law for righteousness, He was ending it as a means of approaching God or as a means of living, not as a means of getting saved (initially). The next verse states this clearly, "For Moses writes *of* the righteousness that comes from the Law, that the man doing them, **lives** by them." The law was a way of life, a way of daily living. It was not a way of salvation. Paul then played off of two passages from the Old Testament in verses six through eight, to demonstrate that God's righteousness is impossible. Who can ascend to heaven and bring Christ down? Who can descend into the Abyss to bring Christ up? In other words, only God can do that, and this where men struggle, trying to do what only God can do.

So, when Paul wrote verses nine and ten, he wasn't thinking about initial salvation. Paul was writing about how one lives. Therefore, the confession is part of the Christian life, not initial salvation. The believing that God raised Christ from the dead (in this context) is also part of the Christian life. On a daily basis, the believer can and should agree (confess) the Christ is God. On

a daily basis, the believer can and should believe in the resurrection. Faith is never simply that an act happened, that is mental agreement. Whenever the word faith occurs, it implies that a promise is present. The promise produces a hope, and the hope is the basis of faith. Therefore, by using the word faith, Paul meant more than ascent to the fact that God raised Christ from the dead. Faith means that God has made a promise for the Christian life which is tied to Christ's resurrection. Paul cites some of these promises in this letter. "We might walk in newness of life" (6:4); "we shall also live with Him." (6:8); "the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the One raising Christ from dead ones will make alive also your mortal bodies" (8:10b-11a); "There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (8:1); "Who is the one condemning? Christ Jesus, the One dying, now rather being raised, Who also is in God's right hand, Who also intercedes in our place" (8:34). These are a sample of promises tied to Christ's resurrection.

Therefore, in this context, believing that God has raised Christ from the dead is the act of a Christian, not the initial act of faith. One who is still condemned, not forgiven, and separated from God needs to believe in the resurrection of Christ as part of the gospel, but the Roman saints didn't need to repeat their initial act of faith. They needed to believe in God's promises related to Christ's resurrection for the purpose of growing. Apart from such faith in the Christian life, the believer will remain unstable, and can not grow. Paul expressed this stability of growth in the words, "you will be saved."

The confession was a verbal agreement regarding the person of Jesus Christ. One of the issues in this verse involves the meaning of the title Lord (Romans 10:9,10). Lord could mean Deity or Master, or possibly both connected in one idea.¹² Evangelical discussion of the title Lord in these verses revolves around whether one

¹² For some examples, and a discussion of the emphases of the word Lord, see Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969) pp. 173-176.

is required to verbally acknowledge Jesus Christ to be God or Master. This issue is part of a debate regarding whether one must make or acknowledge Christ to master over his whole life in order to be saved (initially). Those (myself included) who do not hold to such a view have often replied that this is confession that Jesus is God.¹³ So, Charles Ryrie writes, "It is the confession of Jesus as God and thus faith in the God-Man that saves from sin."¹⁴ However, we have seen that initial salvation is not Paul's point, but rather, that Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness for those who are believing. I would contend that Jesus as Deity is in view, but the verbal confession or agreement may also involve recognition of His Lordship or position as Master over believers. This would then mean, that for the believer to go on in salvation, that is to mature, he needs to deal with Christ's right to being his Master in addition to being his Savior. This is Paul's very point in the opening verses of Romans 12. To conclude, Romans 10:9-10 deals with the issue of present tense salvation, not what is required to become saved.

The Practical Benefits of Understanding Future Tense Salvation.

While I was declared righteous in the past, and that salvation is on going, my salvation is not yet complete. Therefore, in the future, I shall be saved from the wrath to come (Romans 5:9). In fact, while Paul did not diminish the past tense of our salvation, he really anticipated the present and future tense of our salvation on the basis of Christ's life (v. 10). That salvation begun in the past, is nearer than when we first believed

(13:11). This "nearer" salvation is not initial but future. We are to be those eagerly anticipating the future.

However, many believers do not anticipate the future. Some believers are so wrapped up in the present life, that the future has no appeal. Other believers fear their future because of how the judgment seat of Christ has been taught. Some have even been told that they will be saved but in some sense excluded from the future kingdom. While some teachers feel this type of teaching serves as a remedy against loose living, it has the opposite outcome.¹⁵ It encourages believers to live as legalists, that is, people who are trying to prove their worth to God. The Bema serves to encourage the right kind of Christian life, but only when understood properly.

The Bema [A.V. "judgment"] Seat of Christ should never be pointed to as a threat for being bad. It is a very positive event. In fact it is an important part of the completion of our salvation. Keep in mind, that no sins, etc. are dealt with at this event. This event deals entirely with our "works", that is, what we have done in "service" to God. The questions asked at the Bema Seat is "How have we built upon the foundation of Christ?" The one having done great service, from man's point of view, but did such service from selfish motives, selfish ambition, contention, etc. will experience the burning away of all such works. If all of one's works are burned away, he is saved (1 Corinthians 3:15). The next phrase of this verse, "yet so as through fire", has been frequently understood by many Christians to mean, "he is saved, but just barely."¹⁶ No Christian is

¹³ I have taken this exact view in the past.

¹⁴ Ryrie, op cit, p. 175.

¹⁵ Both the Arminian and Reformed theologian use this tactic. The Arminian presses for "good behavior" by claiming one can lose his salvation. The Reformer concludes that bad behavior or failure to produce good, visible fruit means one was never saved at all. In both cases, the individual is designated unsaved or lost. Yet, grace teachers follow a similar course by warning of a significant future loss for the believer, and for some, even an exclusion from certain areas of fellowship. This is nothing more than Old Testament Law applied to the Christian. Under Law, believers did earn varying degrees of future salvation. That is not true of us. We are one new man, one bride of Christ, and in Revelation 19, there is a single bride wearing a single garment formed of the corporate righteousnesses (plural) of the saints (plural).

¹⁶ The NET and ESV Bibles translate this phrase "but only as through fire." This really gives the impression that if not for the fire, he wouldn't be saved.

just barely saved! In reality this statement is an important part of our future tense of salvation. The phrase “yet so as through fire” begins with the adverb *houtōs* [οὕτως], a word which describes manner. It can be translated “in this way” or “in this manner.” The idea is then that we are saved (this is future tense salvation) by the burning off of those “good works.” Who wants to go to heaven with the baggage of works which were done selfishly or in loyalty to some christian leader (e.g. for Paul, for Peter, for Apollos)? The believer is brought to his completed salvation by burning away or removing the dross of wrong works or “good” works done on the basis of wrong motives. Even believers who have done many good works, have done some which were not God’s will. All believers will therefore experience the removal of such burdens, and by that act they are saved. They are brought to their final state.

Since many have confused our rule of life with that for Israel, and have brought Grace believers under the Law, many think that we are earning our future tense of salvation. We have misapplied many passages directed at Israel (cp. Luke 19:17, 19; Matthew 25:21, 23). This misapplication places Grace believers under statements addressed to unsaved Jews and which pertain to their judgment. Believers have even been threatened with being cast outside the kingdom. But Peter encouraged believers to know that our present difficulties are only serving to prove our faith (1 Peter 1:6-7). Ultimately this proving will end as we see Christ (v. 7b). In that moment our salvation will begin to be completed. Our body and soul (senses and emotions) will be saved (v. 9), so that with our spirit we will be complete. Peter does not say that we earn this, rather that this is grace that will be borne to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ (v. 13). I don’t earn any part of my salvation. Even in the future, at the Rapture, my salvation is brought to its completion by God in grace. That means that the burning away of worthless works is an act of God’s grace, not an act of punishment or negative judgment. This

does not encourage slothful living. Peter wrote that it is the girdle with which we are to bind up our thoughts. Knowing that our salvation is completed by grace just as it began and is being worked out, encourages growth.

What does the believer receive for works done well? He receives a crown, or better a victor’s wreath. The race is completed and wreaths are passed out to those who ran the race according to the rules and finished the course. The wreaths are given for five areas of service: dealing with temptation, using one’s gift, proclaiming the gospel, controlling one’s self so as to be a good example to others, living with eager anticipation for the Lord’s appearing. What do believers do with those wreaths? Revelation 4:10 states that the elders cast the crowns before God’s throne and acknowledge His worth. In heaven, we’ll realize that anything we’ve done in a worthy fashion was because of His worth, not our own. Well, if it is by God’s grace, then how could our merits come to bear on our salvation?

Here is an important lesson for us in the tenses of salvation. Rather than discouraging genuine believers with the possibility that they really aren’t saved, or that they will be excluded from God’s future purpose for the Church, or that they will be denigrated to some low “office” in the kingdom, they ought to be encouraged to grow and anticipate our complete salvation, which is all by God’s grace, from start to finish. Our God is so great!

Recognizing key distinctions regarding various forms of the word “saved” affects more than just the reading of a few select passages. It affects our understanding of whole books of the Bible. Common interpretation of many books fails to consider the audience of the book. This is especially true of the New Testament letters. Many letters are read as though they are written to an audience of unsaved people. Yet the New Testament letters are clearly addressed not to churches in general but believers. Paul’s salutation in Romans is not to all Romans, but to “all the ones being in Rome, loved ones of God,

called ones, saints.” (Romans 1:7). The influence of a theology which views the local church as a mix of saved and unsaved in a local area¹⁷ has affected our reading of these letters. This may be true in our churches today, probably because churches have tailored their activities to make the unsaved welcome and comfortable, rather than focusing on the need to feed the sheep. However, what is true of our modern churches does not appear to have been generally true of the first century churches.

Almost all the New Testament letters were written, at least in part, to address some doctrinal problem in a local assembly or assemblies as in the case of the Galatians churches. Those doctrinal problems almost always involved how the saints in those churches were living. So Romans was written primarily to establish (cause to stand firmly- *στηριζω*) believers (Romans 1:11). Paul wrote 1 Corinthians so they would say the same thing and rather than be divided they would be thoroughly adjusted in the same mind and opinion (1 Corinthians 1:10). Paul wrote the Galatian churches because he was concerned that those saints were so quickly turning from the one who called them (Galatians 1:6). That one was the Holy Spirit (3:3). They were turning to a different gospel, a gospel which taught that the Christian life was lived, not by the Spirit but by law (1:6-7; 3:2). Paul wrote the Ephesians because they needed to see how God’s grace had and should affect the relationship between believers of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds (Ephesians 1:6; 2:8; 3:2-6). Few would quibble with the above summation of 1 Corinthians, but see Romans and Galatians, and certain verses in Ephesians (e.g. 2:8) to be addressing matters of initial salvation. By reading these as addressing initial salvation, they miss the value these books have for the Christian life, and the very real struggles believers have in the area of present tense salvation.

When we fail to recognize distinctions of this nature we cause problems for ourselves and others. This is a simple principle which we can apply to our own personal reading and Bible study. It involves discernment followed by tremendous benefits. Understanding God’s design for our spiritual lives and our future is great. To understand those benefits, we must distinguish word meanings in their context. We have a great salvation; begun in the past and on going. We await its completion in the future. “Well spoken of is the God even Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3).

¹⁷ This is the view of both the Catholic Church and the original Reformers and continues to affect the theology of both groups today. Since contemporary Evangelicalism is heavily influenced by Reformed theology, this idea is common among modern Evangelicals and reflected in their interpretation.