

# Adjustments To Popular Evangelical Theology

Serious readers of the Bible may at times be puzzled by certain expressions of the Apostles. This series of messages was occasioned by Peter's words in 1 Peter 4:17-18, "For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? and if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?" (NASB). How can Peter speak of the *difficulty* of righteous people being saved? Isn't salvation without work or effort on our part? And why does Peter refer to the unbeliever as one who does not *obey* the gospel of God? Many of us would not use such expressions and feel uncomfortable when others use them. We might even suspect others of error if they used such expressions. Our difficulty in understanding such passages manifests that a significant shift has taken place in our understanding of salvation compared to the understanding of the New Testament writers. Is it possible that we are misrepresenting what it means to be saved? to be a Christian? This series of messages, including three question and answer sessions, encourages us to make four adjustments to how salvation is commonly understood in Evangelicalism today.

## **Part 1: Our definition of salvation needs to be expanded (messages 1-3).**

In the minds of many salvation is almost a synonym for forgiveness and a guarantee of deliverance from future punishment. This "one aspect salvation" is usually viewed as something that occurred once in the past. These messages challenge such notions and explain that the meaning of salvation in the New Testament is *comprehensive* of all the work God does for His people in Christ *in the past, present, and future*. A Christian has been saved, is being saved and will be saved. The serious implications of the loss of the New Testament's *comprehensive* definition of salvation are discussed.

## **Part 2: We must stop ignoring Christ's teaching on the difficulty of being saved (messages 4-6).**

Many of our contemporary representations of salvation seem to be in conflict with a category of Jesus' teachings that emphasize the difficulty of being saved and entering into the kingdom and that only those who endure to the end will be saved. Some segments of the church have long ignored or dismissed these sayings and emphasized, "once saved always saved". This approach suggests that these statements have nothing to do with obtaining eternal life. Other segments of the church have taught that these warnings should be taken seriously and that Christians can lose their salvation. These messages demonstrate that neither of these solutions is correct and that Jesus' statements, when viewed in the light of a *biblical definition of salvation*, cannot be interpreted to teach either a works based salvation or the temporary nature of salvation.

## **Part 3: The popular expressions, "once saved always saved" and "eternal security" are inadequate representations of the Bible's teaching on the permanent nature of salvation (messages 7 and 8).**

Eternal security has often been understood to mean that a person is assured of eternal life regardless of how he or she lives and that it is wrong to question a person's profession of faith. Others have taught that this view is incorrect and that fruits are a necessary evidence that a person is a Christian, and that Christians do fall from grace and lose their salvation. In these messages the two positions are respectively termed the, "Forever Saved Without Fruit Position" and the "Loss of Salvation Position". It is demonstrated that both of these positions are incorrect, and that they are both based on an inadequate definition of salvation. The NT teaches that endurance to the end is required *and* that God gifts endurance as part of the gifting of salvation in Christ.

## **Part 4: The practice of unconditionally accepting the profession of a thing for the thing itself needs to end (messages 9 and 10).**

There is a significant amount of biblical data that not only tells us that it is right for the church to tell people that they are not Christians, but in many cases, a church, in order to be faithful, must tell individuals that regardless of their professions, they are not Christians. Of course this is to be done as an effort to evangelize them and bring them to genuine faith in Christ. In these messages a number of New Testament

passages are considered that clearly show cases when we are not to *unconditionally* accept a person's claim that they are a Christian, or born again, or have repented, or know God, or believe in Christ.

**Part 5: Summary and Conclusion (message 11).**

This last message summarizes the four adjustments and shows their interrelatedness. In order to avoid any misunderstanding that the importance of forgiveness has been minimized due to the emphasis that salvation is not *only* forgiveness, the series concludes with a discussion of the life transforming effect of the reception of God's forgiveness in Christ.