

Review of a Tract: "WHAT IS MEANT BY SALVATION?"

A few days ago the church here received a packet in the mail in which there were a number of tracts and booklets that "The Tract League" (evidently a denominational publishing company) had sent for our consideration. We want to make some observations about one particular tract they sent that is entitled *What Is Meant By Salvation?*

First, the outward appearance of the tract is itself pleasing to the eye. There was nothing "tacky" about the quality of the printing, so the tract cannot be faulted for looking shabby. The Lord's church, while striving to work as economically as possible and not waste His money or be extravagant, needs to put out written materials that do not give the impression of being cheap or second rate. On the other hand, the outward appearance of an object or activity does not tell the whole story. Eve seems to have been pleased or impressed with the looks of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but look at the horrible mess she found herself in when she dug into it (Genesis 3)!

Second, the tract in question discusses an important Bible topic. We cannot think of any topic that would be more relevant than "salvation." God sent His Son for our salvation because it is His will that all men be saved (1 Timothy 1:15; 2:4). It is certainly commendable when people are thinking seriously about the salvation of man's soul. But, we must be careful to note that not everything men say and write about "salvation" is in harmony with the Lord's will.

The tract under consideration has twelve divisions in it. In nine of these there are quotations from the Bible. The people who mailed this literature to us obviously were not ashamed of quoting the word of God. They certainly cannot be faulted for quoting from the holy word of Jehovah. How interesting and flabbergasting that in marked contrast to that, some of our brethren speak on radio programs or publish bulletins and other periodicals in which the Bible is rarely, if ever mentioned, let alone quoted! However, this word of caution is in order: simply to quote the Bible does not prove that the one who quotes it is saved, nor does it prove that he/she properly interprets it. Satan quoted the Old Testament scriptures when he tempted our Lord in the wilderness (Matthew 4:6; Psalm 91:11), but who wants to credit the tempter with pleasing God or correctly using the word of God?! Remember, there are some who pervert the gospel (Galatians 1:6-9), twisting or wresting the scriptures "unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

Yes, the tract of which we are speaking, *What Is Meant By Salvation*, "looks nice" to the physical eye, speaks of a significant topic, and quotes verses from the Bible. But, there is much with this tract, yea very much indeed, that is weighed in the balances and "found wanting" (Daniel 4:27)! One of the quoted passages of Scripture is 1 John 1:8,9, wherein

we read, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We cannot argue with these statements, for they are the words of the living God. However, it is completely out of place to quote them to a non-Christian and encourage him to confess his sins with the hopes that such will cause the Lord to blot out his sins. This is the very thing that this tract does: it indicates that one who is not a child of God can be saved by confessing his/her sins before the Lord.

It is essential that we understand that the book of 1 John, including the verses which speak of confessing sins, was written to Christians. We easily see this from 1 John 2:12: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." Those to whom John wrote this epistle were saved, meaning they were already in Christ. Thus, confession of sins in prayer to God (when coupled with genuine repentance, Acts 8:21-23) is what God calls upon *a Christian* to do, not one who is out of Christ. In view of this, the tract in question is off the mark, way off the mark, in proposing that one who is unsaved can be cleansed of unrighteousness simply by prayer and confession of sin.

Another problem with this tract is its incomplete information. For example, we are told, "Salvation is a gift, pure and simple. God gives us salvation on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done for us ... We receive it by believing." In view of the Scriptures we cannot dispute the fact that salvation is a gift (Ephesians 2:8,9). Nor can we argue against the idea that man receives this gift or is justified "by believing" (Romans 5:1). The tract again states, "Those who believe are saved." Is salvation by faith? Absolutely (Ephesians 2:8; Acts 16:31). But here is the problem: this tract, like so many that denominational groups publish, makes it appear that salvation is by "faith only." The Bible clearly declares that a person is not justified by faith only (James 2:24), but by a faith which acts and obeys by love (Galatians 5:6).

Now here is a tract entitled *What Is Meant By Salvation*, and not one time is repentance mentioned. Of course faith/believing is emphasized in it, but not one word about repentance! We do not suggest that every tract on every topic must touch on the theme of repentance. However, a tract that is supposed to tell one about salvation and how to be saved from past sins ought to include all the necessary actions, and repentance is certainly one of them! On the day of Pentecost Peter told the Jews to repent in order to have the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and Paul preached repentance as a command of God (Acts 17:30). Any "appeal" to sinners that does not include repentance is not complete.

We could say the same thing about both confession of faith in Jesus and water baptism. According to the New Testament these two are also conditions of salvation for a person who is out of Christ, yet neither of them is anywhere to be found in this tract on "salvation." "... with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10; cf. Acts 8:37). Who could doubt that confession of faith in God's Son is essential? Baptism is also commanded for those who want to have their sins washed away or be saved (Acts

22:16; Mark 16:16). But again, mention of baptism in this tract is completely absent. So, once more this tract about salvation comes up wanting, incomplete and deceptive. It does not tell God's complete story about what one must do in order to be saved.

Then, and we are not surprised, the tract ends with "the usual." Just what is "the usual?" An appeal to the reader to accept God's gift of salvation and be saved by praying to Jesus. Here it is: "If you are ready to accept this gift, pray this prayer: 'Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God. I believe that you died on the cross for my sins and that you rose from the dead. You are my salvation. Please wash all my sins away and make me a child of God. I give my life to you today. Amen.'" "

Some might be wondering what is wrong with such a prayer. Our answer is "a lot!" First of all, nowhere in the Bible do we ever read that Jesus or His faithful servants ever instructed any person who was not a child of God to pray. We might read of some people praying who were not faithful children of God, but never does the divine record indicate that our Lord or His servants told the unsaved to pray. Secondly, and this is directly to the heart of the matter of salvation, not one time in the New Testament do we read of Jesus or His faithful servants saying that unsaved people ought to pray in order to receive the remission of sins. Not one time! Yet, the so-called "sinner's prayer" (to pray and accept Jesus as one's personal Savior) is used worldwide by various denominational groups. There is just no Scripture to support it, none! Thus, it is not from God, but men (Matthew 21:25). It is the doctrine of men, causing worship to the Lord to be in vain (Mark 7:7). It is false teaching, and false teaching never helped a single person be saved or faithfully serve the Lord God.

The tract that we have briefly reviewed is very similar to scores of others that denominations distribute by the millions. As with so many of them, one of the great dangers in this tract is that it is a mixture of God's truth and the teachings of men. Yes, salvation is a great topic. But, unfortunately the bottom line on the tract under consideration is this: (1) It leaves out part of God's truth on the subject; (2) it perverts part of what the Bible says; and (3) it adds things that men have dreamed up. As a result we have no choice but to reject this tract and all others like it. Let each of us give diligence to study the Bible so we can be certain of our own salvation, so we can tell others what the word of God says about how to be saved, and so we can detect and refute all false teaching about salvation.

-- Roger D. Campbell