



**Salvation
by Deeds and Grace**

by Don Dainty



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ISBN: 1-896331-63-7

Printed in Canada

‘Salvation’

By Deeds and Grace

“That which is conducive to the regeneration of the world and the salvation of the peoples and kindreds of the earth hath been sent down from the heaven of the utterance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. Give ye a hearing ear to the counsels of the Pen of Glory. Better is this for you than all that is on the earth.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 223)

Introduction

The need to seek individual and collective safety, ‘salvation’ in the ultimate sense, by prayerfully invoking God’s direct assistance, has been part of human experience from the remotest times.

The descriptions associated with the word ‘salvation’ in the Oxford Companion to the Bible (pp. 669-670), are informative. Some of the ideas expressed there are briefly presented in the following meditation.

The Hebrew Bible speaks often of salvation, but evidently in the sense of safety, or victory in this world, rather than in an other-worldly sense. For example, the ultimate restoration of the Jews to the Promised Land, a Covenant matter of great importance to His ‘chosen people’, is characterized in terms of salvation by Ezekiel and Isaiah. Similarly, having been saved from a disastrous shipwreck, St. Paul’s rescue is described in terms of salvation.

The Gospels and Letters of the New Testament, on the other hand, speak of salvation in overwhelmingly other-worldly terms, ultimate salvation attending belief in Christ. Other aspects of salvation are reflected by spiritual healing, and by admission into the Kingdom of God. Such were the expectations of the early Christians regarding their own salvation. But they also projected salvation onto

those who would respond to the Second Christ in 'that day', the Day of His Return.

Christ is therefore the agent of salvation, the 'Saviour', both of the former and latter Days.

Even His name, Jesus, as well as those of other major Biblical figures including, Joshua, Hosea, Isaiah, and Elisha, find a common root in a Hebrew word often meaning victory and also rescue, deliverance, and protection, giving intimation to their eventual importance as 'Saviours'.

Christian Approaches to Salvation

Of the many references to salvation in the New Testament, some make reference to belief in Christ as being a major requirement for salvation (salvation by 'grace'), while others add 'works' (salvation by 'deeds') as another necessary requirement. Differences of viewpoint or emphasis regarding salvation by deeds vs. grace, have been long-standing in Christendom (see an interesting discussion in the *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, p. 341, which downplays the differences in approach between James and Paul).

With respect to belief being a necessary qualification for salvation, St. Paul said:

Salvation by Belief and Faith:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith..."

(Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans 1:16)

Other Biblical requirements for salvation, such as:

- 1) obedience to His Word,
- 2) the performance of good deeds and works,
- 3) the acquisition of virtues, and
- 4) the avoidance of sin,

are described in the following citations.

Obedience to His Word:

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

(Philippians 2:12)

“Though he were a Son (Jesus), yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

(Hebrews 5:8-9)

The Performance of Good Works:

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto him, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith if it hath not works, is dead, being alone... Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only...”

(General Epistle of James, the brother of Christ – 2:14-26)

The Acquisition of Virtues:

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

(Titus 2:11-12)

Avoidance of Sin:

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; And he is the propitiation of our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”

(I John 2:1-3)

Affirmations and Abrogations

A major aspect of the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, the ‘Christ returned in the glory of the Father’, is the validation of long-held, previously revealed spiritual concepts and principles.

Christ performed this same function when he validated the Laws of Moses, as St. Matthew attests by quoting Christ:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily, I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the

same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matthew 5:17-19)

Notice, however, that when the Second Coming – Bahá'u'lláh – fulfills the expectations of Christians, He will have the power to change the law! Notice further that Christ also validated the Hebraic law by highlighting and summarizing it to answer a question:

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

(Matthew 22:30-40)

As expected, Bahá'u'lláh has indeed abrogated prior law with the confirmation of a new calendar for the Millennium, for example. Further, He has given all-together new teachings, such as the spiritual validity of the Revelations other than those of the Judaeo-Christian traditions, and, notably, the equality of women and men. In addition, He has corrected aberrations in past interpretations, such as the true nature of the three aspects of the Trinity – Christ spoke with the authority of God but He was not the Creator nor His equal.

Finally, Bahá'u'lláh has also affirmed many of the Christian precepts that have been outlined above. For example, in the following excerpt, He stated the ‘twin duties’ of recognition and obedience – confirmation that both salvation by belief (grace) and obedience (deeds and works), are requirements for salvation.

Salvation by Belief and Obedience:

“The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof, hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 330-331)

Bahá'u'lláh Defines Salvation

In His Writings Bahá'u'lláh elaborates on the nature of ‘salvation’. Some of these statements are reproduced below.

Regarding Good Works:

“Blessed is the man that hath acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs... Such a recognition hath been made by God the ornament of every belief, and its very foundation. Upon it must depend the acceptance of every goodly deed.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 86-87)

“Beseech ye God – magnified be His glory – to grant that His loved ones may be privileged to take a portion from the ocean of His good-pleasure, for this would serve as the means for the salvation of man-

kind, and may of their own accordance carry out that which would purify them and cause them to attain everlasting life...”

(Huqúqu'lláh, #22)

Obedience and Salvation:

“Were He to decree as lawful the thing which from time immemorial had been forbidden, and forbid that which had, at all times, been regarded as lawful, to none is given the right to question His authority... Such is the teaching which God bestoweth on you, a teaching that will deliver you from all manner of doubt and perplexity, and enable you to attain unto salvation in both this world and in the next. He, verily, is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Bountiful.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 86-87)

The Acquisition of Virtues:

“O beloved friends! Whoever adorneth his character with such virtues will be reckoned among the true servants of God, and his name will be commemorated by the Concourse on High... Strive diligently to acquire such goodly qualities and traits of character as will be the cause of everlasting salvation. Make not the fruits of the tree of trustworthiness targets for the stones of treachery, nor rend its boughs asunder with the instruments of tyranny and oppression. Truthfulness and sincerity have always been the ornament of a man's character, and so they shall ever be.”

(Trustworthiness #23)

Sacrifice and Salvation:

“We, verily, have come for your sakes, and have borne the misfortunes of the world for your salvation. Flee ye the One Who hath sacrificed His life that ye may be quickened? Fear God, O followers of the Spirit (Jesus), and walk not in the footsteps of every divine that hath gone far astray... Open the doors of your hearts. He Who is the Spirit (Jesus) verily, standeth before them. Wherefore keep ye afar from Him Who hath purposed to draw you nigh unto a Resplendent Spot? Say: We, in truth, have opened unto you the gates of the Kingdom. Will ye bar the doors of your houses in My face?...”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 92)

Social Salvation:

“That which is conducive to the regeneration of the world and the salvation of the peoples and kindreds of the earth hath been sent down from the heaven of the utterance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. Give ye a hearing ear to the counsels of the Pen of Glory. Better is this for you than all that is on the earth. Unto this beareth witness My glorious and wondrous Book.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 223)

Conclusion

The above citations from Scripture clarify a number of important matters.

Salvation is multi-faceted, but the pre-eminent Biblical stand is confirmed in Bahá'í Scripture. That is – belief (recognition of the Manifestation of the Holy Spirit – Christ and Bahá'u'lláh) is essen-

tial, but that, in addition, the obedient expression of that belief in action (good works and deeds, the acquisition of virtues, and the avoidance of sin), is likewise essential, as these 'twin duties' are inseparable.

The emphasis associated with salvation changes with the unfolding, spiritually progressive education, that is revealed by Moses, then Christ and then Bahá'u'lláh – from law, to love, and then to justice.

Further, it becomes clear from Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that salvation, and the road to it, has been central to all the Messages revealed to humankind throughout history; through the Revelators, be they of the Judaeo-Christian traditions or of those of the 'other folds' of the earth that are all destined to be conjoined during the 'time of the end'.

This means that Bahá'u'lláh will bring that promised universal salvation, not only of the individual in the eyes of God, but also of human society. It will be characterized by racial harmony, universal peace and justice in all facets of life on this planet – the long-anticipated 'Kingdom of God on Earth'!

"O my God, the God of bounty and Mercy!
Thou art that King by Whose commanding Word the
whole creation hath been called into being; and Thou
art that All-Bountiful One the doing of Whose ser-
vants have never hindered Him from showing forth
His grace, nor have they frustrated the revelations of
His bounty. Suffer this servant, I beseech Thee, to at-
tain unto that which is the cause of his salvation in
every world of Thy worlds."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *US Prayer Book*, 1991 edition, p. 146)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Books mentioned are available in most public libraries.

Local **Telephone** listings are often in your phone book under "*Bahá'í Faith*".

In Canada **Vision TV** broadcasts *Bahá'í Perspective* the first Wednesday and Thursday of each month (check local listings).

Please feel free to contact any one of the following:

Bahá'í World Centre Web Site:

www.bahai.org

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7200 Leslie Street,
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415 Linden Avenue
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Bahá'í Information Line in Canada 1-800-433-3284 for recorded messages about the Bahá'í Faith, its teachings and perspectives on social issues, in English and French.

Bahá'í information is also available in many world languages.



ISBN: 1-896331-63-7

Printed in Canada