

Salvation: One Way for Us and ANOTHER Way for O.T. Israel?

Let's start by asking the question: Is God **fair**? Does God have a double standard? Does God have one way of salvation for one group of people, and a different---infinitely more *difficult*---way of salvation for others?

It is a very widespread belief among church-goers that God has one way of salvation for Christians, and a very *different* way of salvation for Jews---or, at least, for the Jews of Old Testament times. The thought is, that ever since the time of Christ, all that anyone has to do to gain salvation is to profess belief in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. For the Jews of Old Testament times, however, they supposedly could gain salvation only by law-keeping and animal sacrifice.

So, again, does God have *two ways* to salvation? One way for those of Old Testament times, and another way for us today? To answer this question, let's consider three points.

(1) God is Not a Respector of Persons

The Bible states that "God is **NO** respecter of persons" (Acts 10: 34, KJV). The *New King James* renders it like this: "God shows *no* partiality." Yet, if it were true what many people believe on this subject, then God would be a *tremendous* respecter of persons!....that for a period of about 1,500 years mankind had to obey supposedly harsh laws in order to gain salvation; whereas ever *since* then, all that one has to do to gain salvation is to accept Christ. What an unfair God that would be---a God who shows great partiality between people! In one group, a lack of obedience leads to loss of salvation; whereas those in the other group are saved by grace, with *nothing* required of them, other than to profess Christ.

The 6th chapter of Ephesians also speaks of God's impartiality: "there is *no* partiality with Him" (verse 9). Also, in the third chapter of Malachi, we read this: "For I am the Lord, **I do not change**" (verse 6). Yet, **what** a change that would be---if God dealt so *dramatically different* with these two groups of people!

(2) Old Testament Israel Wasn't OFFERED Salvation!

Israel was God's "chosen nation." This was so, **not** because God was playing favorites, but because He had a job for them to do!

One reason God raised up the nation Israel was so that they would live His way of life---according to His laws---and thereby serve as an *example* or "light" to the other nations (Deut. 4:5-8). So, God entered into an agreement (covenant) with this nation which He was raising up. The agreement was that **if** the people would obey His law, God would grant them---NOT salvation---but material and national blessings (Deut. 28: 1-14; Ex. 19:5-6).

The people agreed to these terms, but then overall utterly *failed* to obey. They did not uphold *their* part of the agreement or covenant.

Yet, God knew *beforehand* that such would be the case! And this fulfilled *another* of God's great purposes in raising up the nation Israel: to *demonstrate* that mankind **needs** the Holy Spirit dwelling within him. God never *offered* the Holy Spirit to those of Old Testament times---*only* to the prophets and patriarchs. Without God's Spirit in them, the Israelites could **not** truly live God's way. They could **not**

live by the spirit and intent of God's law; and oftentimes they did a very poor job of obeying even the *letter* of the law.

So, not having God's Spirit, they **proved** what we read in Rom. 8:7---"the carnal [natural] mind is enmity [hostile] *against* God; for it is not **subject** to the law of God, **nor indeed can be.**"

Notice what Herbert W. Armstrong said: "God gave PROOF, through Israel, that WITHOUT the Holy Spirit, MAN IS HELPLESS! They even had God to appeal to. But they did not have His Spirit *within* them....One of the *purposes* of this nation was to prove by human experience that man **without** the Spirit of God within him **cannot** be righteous" (*Mystery of the Ages*, 1985, p. 175).

So, this was the lesson of the Old Covenant. And **just as** under the *Old* Covenant, those who enter the *New* Covenant also (at baptism) enter an agreement with God to strive to live by His spiritual law, summarized by the Ten Commandments.

Yet, notice this important difference in the two Covenants. The New Covenant is based on "*better* promises" (Heb. 8:6). Instead of the Old Covenant promise of national blessing and greatness, those who fulfill their calling under the *New* Covenant have *two* "better" promises: (1) the promise of a resurrection to *eternal life*, and (2) the promise of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is the *essential ingredient* **OF** the New Covenant.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is the "essential ingredient." Having God's Spirit within you, **enables** you to fulfill *your part* of the Covenant agreement: to *obey* God's spiritual law---to obey not only the *letter* of the law, but also its spirit and intent.

What was the *fault* of the Old Covenant? The "fault" of the Old Covenant was NOT with the law, but with the people! Notice verse 8: "Because finding fault with **them** [with the Israelites], He says: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a **new** covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah---*not* according to the covenant that I made with their fathers...For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: **I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts...**'"

Yes, **both the Old and New Covenants are based on the keeping of God's spiritual law!** The New Covenant, rather than doing *away* with the law, actually *validates* God's spiritual law! How? By putting God's *laws* right into the minds and hearts of those who enter into that Covenant.

What's more, the exceedingly wonderful news is that this New Covenant is not only for Israelites alone, but also for Gentiles!

Let's now look at one other passage in this regard. "So then, those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God. But you are *not* in the flesh but in the Spirit, **IF** indeed the Spirit of God dwells **IN** you" (Rom. 8: 8-9). This passage plainly shows that it is only by having the Spirit of God **IN** us, that we *can* please God ---that we *can* live a life of obedience to His spiritual law. Because *without* God's Spirit in us, we are in the category of people spoken of in verse 7: we are "not *subject* to the **law** of God, *nor indeed can be*!"

Again, the Holy Spirit is the essential ingredient of the New Covenant. And that brings us to the third and final point.

(3) **The One and ONLY Way to Salvation**

We can begin to see this "one and only way to salvation" by reading Rom. 8:11---"But **IF** the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead *dwells in you*, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to *your* mortal bodies [How?] **through His Spirit** who [which] dwells in you." So we see that having God's Spirit dwelling *in you*, is the one and *only* **means** to salvation---the only means to life after death.

So, the big question is, how can a person come to *have* God's Spirit dwelling within him? Peter sums up the answer for us: "*Repent*, and let every one of you be baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the remission of sins; and you **shall receive** the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

At baptism, we actually enter a *covenant* (or agreement) with God. God agrees to give us His Holy Spirit *on the condition that* (1) we accept Christ as our Savior, and (2) we **repent** of---turn from---our past way of life. We make an unconditional *surrender* to God---that we will henceforth *strive*, with the help of the Holy Spirit---to live in accordance with God's *spiritual law*.

As we're told in Acts 5:32, God gives His Spirit only "to those who **obey** Him"---only to those who have repented---only to those who are *striving* to live God's way. True Christians---also called "saints"---are described as "those who **keep** the commandments of God" (Rev. 14:12; 12:17).

So, upon entering that agreement with God at baptism, the individual (upon having hands laid upon him) then *receives* God's Spirit. It is the **death** of the old self and the start of a whole *new* life! (Rom. 6:3-6, 12-13).

Yes, at baptism the person begins a new life of being "a living sacrifice" unto God (Rom. 12:1). He enters a lifelong process of having God's **laws** written in his mind and placed in his heart (Heb. 10:16).

In Conclusion

As for the idea that those of Old Testament times had to earn salvation by law-keeping, and that we today are saved by merely professing Christ---both these ideas are wrong! The truth is that God has only **one way** to salvation!

Notes:

1. For a *further* discussion of this subject, see the two articles entitled "Progressive Revelation and Dispensationalism" and "Is BELIEF All That's Necessary for Salvation?"
2. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were given *temporarily* to a carnal people as a reminder of sin. [See the article "the law was our tutor (Galatians 3:23-25)"]
3. Is God a "respector of persons" for offering salvation to those under the New Covenant but *not* to those under the Old Covenant? No, because all who have ever lived will *eventually* be given a chance for salvation. (See the booklet *Is This the Only Day of Salvation?* by Roderick Meredith, pastor of the Living Church of God.)
4. All *true Christians* **are** Israelites---i.e., *spiritual Israelites*---Israelites by *grace*, not necessarily Israelites by race. (See the article "The Old and New Covenants," subheading "New Covenant for GENTILES?")