
BIBLE TALK

(George Battey)

This week the question is: **If I obey God, am I trying to be saved by works?**

A popular idea today is being propagated which states that men are not saved by works of any kind. It is true and the Bible plainly states that men are not saved by works of a certain kind, but some churches are now teaching that we are not saved by works of any kind -- including works of obedience!! Is this true? If I obey what God commanded me, am I trying to be saved by works? Will I therefore lose my salvation because I tried to obey God's commands?

This is a very dangerous doctrine which suggests that when men obey God they are therefore trusting in their works to save themselves! This doctrine:

(1) Encourages disobedience, for if obeying God's will causes me to be lost, that would mean neglecting God's will would cause me to be saved and the Bible never teaches that!

Matthew 7:21

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

(2) Judges the motives of men. It is unfair and wrong to judge the motives of men for we cannot read their minds! Yet this is exactly what some churches do to people! When they see someone obeying God's will and teaching others to obey God's will they immediately judge this person and say he is trusting in his own works to save himself! How do they know what this poor fellow is trusting in? How do they know he is not trusting in God? Can they read his mind and his heart? Surely only God can do that!!

1 Corinthians 4:5

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

The Bible teaches very plainly that men can and men MUST obey every commandment of God and at the same time trust in God to save them. It is possible to obey God and trust in Him at the same time! Not only is this possible, it is essential!

Matthew 5:19

19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

THE CASE OF NAAMAN

To illustrate the point that men can obey and trust God at the same time let us recall the case of Naaman.

In 2 Kings 5 a story is told of a Syrian captain named Naaman. He was a very great soldier and captain, but he was a leper. Unless something happened, Naaman would die a very miserable death from leprosy.

Naaman soon learned of a prophet in Samaria named Elisha. Elisha, he was told, could help him recover from this terrible disease of leprosy.

Naaman took some fellow soldiers and rode off to Samaria and having found Elisha's house he was expecting the old prophet to come out and perform a grand miracle to recover him from his disease. Instead, Elisha didn't even come out to talk with Naaman face to face. He merely sent out a messenger saying to Naaman:

2 Kings 5:10

10 ... "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean."

At first Naaman was angry because things did not turn out like he had anticipated and he felt rather insulted because Elisha didn't even come to speak with him face to face. But after he reconsidered he decided to obey the word of the Lord.

2 Kings 5:14

14 So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Now, my friend, allow me to ask you a few pertinent questions:

(1) When Naaman dipped in the Jordan River, was he trusting in his own works to save him? Do you think he went home boasting and bragging to everyone that he had cleansed himself from this terrible disease?

(Not at all! He knew and everyone with him knew that God was the One responsible for the leprosy being washed away!)

(2) Was there anything in the water itself that washed away his leprosy?

(Again, NO. Naaman realized that the water itself had nothing miraculous in it to wash away leprosy. He knew that for some unknown reason God chose dipping in the water to cleanse him of leprosy. It was God doing it all, but He chose dipping in water as the means of cleansing Naaman.)

(3) Was the leprosy of Naaman washed away before dipping in the water?

(Not at all! Had Naaman dipped only six times he would still have died of leprosy. He was not cleansed until he dipped for the seventh time and only then did he recover from his disease.)

(4) Was it possible for Naaman to obey the Lord exactly?

(Of course. He did not throw his arms up in despair and say, "It's impossible to obey God perfectly and exactly, so I'm not even going to try." He said nothing of the sort. He merely went to the Jordan River and obeyed God's commandment exactly as God gave it! There was nothing impossible about the entire affair.)

APPLICATION

Now, by way of comparison, the Bible teaches that men must be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The Bible plainly states in Acts 22:16 that baptism "washes away sins." Now let's ask the same questions about baptism which we asked about Naaman:

(1) When men obey the Lord and are baptized in water, are they trusting in their own works to save themselves? Do you think men go home boasting and bragging to everyone that they have cleansed themselves from all their terrible sins?

(Not at all! They know and everyone knows that God is the One responsible for sins being washed away!)

(2) Is there anything in the water itself that washes away sins?

(Again, NO. The water itself has nothing miraculous in it to wash away sins. For some unknown reason God chose dipping in water as the occasion of cleansing men from their sins.)

(3) Are the sins of men washed away before dipping in the water?

(Not at all! Just as Naaman had to dip seven times BEFORE being cleansed, men today must be dipped BEFORE they are cleansed.)

(4) Is it possible for men today to obey the Lord exactly?

(Of course. We cannot throw our arms up in despair and say, "It's impossible to obey God perfectly and exactly, so I'm not even going to try." We must simply go and obey God's commandment exactly as God gave it! There was nothing impossible about the entire affair.)

My friend, you can take any command of the Lord and ask the same four questions and receive the same answers. When men obey God they are not trying to be saved by their own works -- they are trying to be saved by God!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Call again next week when we consider a new subject on Bible Talk.