

Camouflage And Salvation

Salvation is Only Through Christ

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There is a term most frequently used in the military service and its business of warfare that is not often heard nor used in normal life. But a Christian's life is not normal. And it is clear from what the apostle Paul said, in several places, that we are involved in a kind of war—a war for our salvation; a war that must be won.

This term is also fairly frequently used in zoology in reference to certain characteristics of animals. One might occasionally see its use in a mystery novel or in the reporting of some true, tragic, evil occurrence in newspapers or news magazines.

The term is camouflage.

It refers to the purposeful disguising of people or things—such as vehicles, gun placements, or field offices (by the military)—in order to hide them. It is also used in terms of concealing one's (or an army's) intent by making use of certain strategy.

It is used of animal coloration and bodily markings that enable the animal to blend in with the surroundings of their natural habitat, so that they are almost invisible except to very careful observation.

And finally, it is used of deceitful people who conceal their intentions for self-advantage in their nefarious schemes.

Camouflage comes to us from the French language. Its most common synonyms as a noun are disguise, concealment, cover-up, cloak, hide, mask, and screen. When used as a verb, it may be replaced by conceal, veil, shroud, falsify, misrepresent, hide, and obscure.

Now except in zoology, it almost always has a negative sense—indicating deviousness is afoot. It is used to mislead, cover up, and conceal the truth of a matter so that one will go on with life never knowing what one has missed, or misunderstood, because a deception has been successfully perpetrated.

We are dealing daily with, undoubtedly, the grand master of deception in Satan—the slandering, deceiving adversary. Jesus said that he was a liar from the beginning and that he is the father of them. He camouflaged his intent in his subtle lie to Adam and Eve, triggering this whole sorry mess that we must function within.

He has the ability to cloak his deceptions against the redeemed by getting us to put undue reliance in salvation upon things that are unquestionably good and even required of us, that nonetheless are not good enough to provide salvation.

Acts 4:10-12 "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

This was spoken by Peter following questions from those who witnessed the healing of the man (at the beginning of Acts 3) at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple; a man known by all to have been lame since birth. Later on in the story it is revealed that he was above forty years old at the time his healing occurred.

Peter's first response to the questioners is an appeal that they pay attention to his words. It is as though he is saying, "Listen carefully to what I say!" Then he adroitly changes the focus of their attention from the *man healed* to Jesus Christ—*who healed the man* at the gate.

The people who were listening knew of Jesus' name because of the uproar in Jerusalem over His crucifixion. In addition to that, they may have heard His

preaching and knew that He had performed miracles all over the Palestine area.

There are those men, named right within the context, who were directly involved in the conspiracy to kill Jesus Christ. However, they cannot understand how He can be credited with this undeniable healing miracle because they delivered Him up to death by crucifixion just two months before!

Peter deliberately uses the name "Jesus" (pointing to His earthly life), but the name means 'Savior' (and they probably knew that) indicating that He will save people from their sins.

In the course of just a couple of seconds, he used "Christ"—pointing to a decidedly spiritual aspect because it indicates His divine mission.

Then he clearly nails the identification of this person that he is extolling by saying Jesus Christ was from Nazareth. Therefore there is no excuse for these people not understanding about whom it was Peter was speaking.

Peter accuses them of putting Jesus to death, but he does not dwell on that because he is emphasizing Jesus' *resurrected life* and power! This is that same Jesus that they put to death. He is now alive and He is using His powers to bring people to spiritual salvation. That, brethren, is the message to you and to me.

Jesus Christ is alive! And that salvation can be obtained no other way, and through no other person—including the self!

Just as surely as Jesus heals people from their physical afflictions (the effects of sin) He is also making us spiritually whole by restoring us to a true relationship with God the Father.

In Acts 10, the subject is somewhat the same:

Acts 10:40-43 "Him God raised up [the resurrection is involved in this] the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but unto the witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did

eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and the dead. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins."

Nobody but Jesus has the ability to provide remission of sins. Nowhere, in all of the world, is there another person, another name, that offers salvation that Jesus provides.

Not everybody (it says in verse 41) has been given the privilege to both grasp this and witness of it in their life. As Peter was speaking that, he was directly referring to himself.

In like manner, those who are converted come within the general framework of that. We have this gift, this privilege, of being able to grasp what he is talking about, and to witness of it in our lives.

Those accusing Peter and John, in Acts 4, did not get it! That was the issue. How could this man Jesus, who is dead (to them), heal this person who for forty years had been lame?

Though the term *grace* is not mentioned in either one of these contexts, Peter is emphasizing the grace that we can receive through Jesus alone.

There is a similarity between these two contexts. In Acts 4, Peter was talking to people who were totally unconverted. In Acts 10, he was talking to Cornelius, his family, and that group there who were on their way to being converted. They were definitely called of God.

Acts 4:12 "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

I want you to notice the word "must." The Greek is very specific here. It does not say 'may' be saved because that would imply permission. There is

also a certain measure of uncertainty in that. Peter is saying here that being saved is not merely a possibility. It doesn't say 'can' be saved, because that would imply an inherent ability in each man to save himself.

It says "must" because salvation through Jesus Christ is a necessity. It cannot be accomplished through any other being. He is that important! If we are going to receive salvation, it is going to be because of Him! Because He is alive! God has established that we *must* be saved through Jesus Christ. There are no other possibilities!

I am saying this because there are things that we can do—good things—that have the ability to camouflage this fact from our mind.

Acts 10:43 "To Him give all the prophets' witness, that through His name whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins."

I am coming back to this because there is something here that is of practical importance. "Practical" means that it is important for making this thing work; so that we have experience with God. This is of practical importance to us.

According to the New Testament commentary by Simon Kistemaker, the word "believes" (King James says believeth) is better translated *believing* because it is written as a present active participle. That means that it denotes continuous action. A present active participle denotes continuous action; therefore it should be translated *believing*, which indicates continuous action.

In other words, it indicates a belief that began in the indefinite past and has continued to the present time—at the time that Peter is speaking there. It is *actively continuing*. It is not a one-time belief, exercised only for forgiveness, and then forgotten; but a belief that continues to be exercised in relation to *everything that name of Jesus implies!*

Peter's reference to the name of Jesus is not merely to what He was called, nor is it just a title, rather it refers to everything that His office implies—as to His work in behalf of men.

The practical aspect of this is: those who are believing will always strive to make choices as to what they do in life, in reference to Christ. In other words, because they are believing, He is their Savior. Because they are believing, He is their Redeemer, their High Priest; Ruler; Master; Teacher; Advocate, and on and on.

Every choice is filtered through and made *because* of the relationship the "believing" have with Him. They are saved *because of Him*, not because of the quality of their works.

I began this sermon talking about camouflage because there are a number of possible areas of thought and action that can skew us into thinking, wrongly, about our part in salvation. I want to begin to give a number of areas that we might need to consider as possibly camouflaging the truth of this matter.

We are saved through the combination of the grace received as the result of Jesus' sinless life and the forgiveness of our sins, *and* His labors as our High Priest and Advocate before the Father during our pilgrimage to *our* Promised Land.

This is nowhere better illustrated than Israel's release from Egypt because of their protection under the blood on the doorpost as the death angel went through the land of Egypt, and then on their trek through the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, *their mediator*.

Would they have ever made it to the Promised Land (to Canaan) without Moses and his faith and his interventions with God on their behalf? Not on your life! How many times did God listen to the appeals of Moses on behalf of the children of Israel?

Yet at the same time, it would have been very easy for the Israelites to mistakenly think that they made it there because of their labor of walking, or enduring the hardships of heat, cold, lack of food and water, doing battle with the people of the land, diseases, and internal divisions.

That thought and attitude could have very easily camouflaged the truth. They made it there because of *God's sovereign purpose* being worked out. In other

words they made it, by His grace from beginning to end, and secondly, because of Moses' relationship with God.

It is *Moses* who is the *type of Jesus Christ as High Priest*. He was the mediator of the Old Covenant. It was Moses who went up to the mount to commune with God. It was Moses who interceded on their behalf time and again; and God remembered his name and spared them.

In like manner, we cannot afford to think of a number of things (that we are *required* to do) as giving us salvation. If we make the mistake of so doing, we make a very serious mistake of giving ourselves far more credit than we deserve!

These are the days of substitutes. Look at your automobile. Your new automobile looks so nice. It almost looks like there is a lot of steel there, but the makers have substituted fiberglass in many, many places.

I would not have a doubt that much of the clothing that has been worn here this very day is polyester or acrylic—substituted for wool, cotton, and linen, the natural things.

Think of the following, that I am going to give you, as possibly being religious substitutes for salvation through Jesus Christ—that might seriously camouflage the truth of what Peter said in Acts 4:12. This list of things needs to be put into their proper perspective. That's what I hope to accomplish in this sermon.

1) Service on behalf of the brethren is *not* salvation. Service is not salvation.

In Matthew 23 Jesus lists a whole lot of accusations that He has against the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:15 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell [or the grave] than yourselves."

The principle that is involved here is of laboring very hard on behalf of the people of the church—for whatever it is that one is laboring for. There is a great number of people who are very zealous about attempting to accomplish things that are undoubtedly good!

The Pharisees were attempting to convert people. This is a big thing in the Christian churches of the world. They go out to attempt to convert others to what it is that they believe religiously or spiritually.

I want to broaden the principle here to other things. It is very possible for us to feel a sense of zeal in converting others to whatever it is that we believe. I do not mean to restrict this to the impulse of converting people to whatever one's religious concepts might be. People will do this to one another regarding diets, fashion designs, athletic teams, automobiles, whatever!

I do not mean to find fault with people's intentions. Those who do this might feel that they have the very best of intentions and that they are just trying to help.

In regard to religion, this proclivity to persuade others (or argue them into the way that one might see things touching on this way of life) becomes exceedingly more serious.

By Jesus using the Pharisees as His model, He is pointing out that this intention may be very well motivated. I am sure that they were motivated by good intentions.

What we find in actual practice is that it is really being motivated by nothing more than a competitive spirit and self-righteousness. Yet the very activity of the person doing this may be camouflaging his real standing with God because he feels good about himself while he is doing this.

Salvation is not given because we feel good about ourselves. It is given on the basis of what *Jesus Christ did*.

No amount of converting others to our way can make up for the damage previously done—when we didn't know God at all! That is a kind of theme that is going to run through every one of these items that I am going to give you.

In Matthew 18, Jesus pointed to little child as reflecting the model attitude for a Christian. How much converting of others to his way does a little child do? Think about that.

A very high percentage of this sort of thing is really nothing more than a competitive spirit and self-righteousness.

Please understand—service is indeed required of all of us. We are not evaluating the intention here, just be aware that *it does not save us*.

2) A second camouflage is: **Making a change**. That is, reforming an area of sin. People may phrase it as 'turning over a new leaf'.

In Isaiah 64:6 there is a lesson. This actually appears within the very midst of a prayer that Isaiah made in behalf of all of Israel. In a sense, he was acting as their intercessor before God. Israel was, in many contexts, a type of the church.

Isaiah 64:6 "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all of our righteousnesses [good things] are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

It must be understood that even after a change, our works will still fall so far short of perfection that there is absolutely no way that they can be accepted as a basis for salvation!

Is the change good? Absolutely! It is good that the person makes the change. Is the change required by God? Yes, it is! Very much so!

The apostle Paul came up with a unique string of words in I Thessalonians 1, that I think puts this into the proper perspective.

I Thessalonians 1:9-10 "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait [meaning to expectantly wait] for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

I want you to notice the direction of the thrust of what Paul is saying there; the direction of his instruction. These people turned from idols to serve God. Is there anybody here that doubts that this was good? That is exactly what we are supposed to do.

These people did not merely regret their sin, but rather they acted on their faith. They exercised their will. They made a positive and necessary change in their life, and Paul is praising them for this!

At the end he says that it is Christ, though, that delivers or rescues us from wrath, not the change!

The word "delivered" can be translated "rescued." Either synonym is what the Greek word actually translated into the English 'saved' means.

It is very interesting that the grammar here actually requires the continuous sense. Thus the word "delivering" or "rescuing" would have been better, showing that we are involved in a process. And, like Moses, Christ is *continuously rescuing us from our sins!* It is not a one-time thing.

So is change required? *Yes, it is .*

If we can understand what Paul said here, Christ (like Moses) is continuously rescuing us.

3) **Right thinking is not salvation.** This too can camouflage the truth.

Is right thinking required of God? Yes, it is! But it too, is not a means of salvation.

As we grow, our thinking changes—and that is good! But if we are not careful, and this thing becomes uncorked or unchecked, it can lead to unmitigated pride.

Let us go back into the Old Testament, to David's Psalm of repentance—Psalm 51. Notice the approach here. This was coming from a converted man who was recognizing that he was a sinner.

Psalm 51:1-6 "Have mercy upon me [Did he need to be delivered? Yes he did! The delivering was continuing.] O God, according to your loving-kindness: according to the multitude of your tender mercies blot out my transgressions. [The multitudes of times that David was forgiven] Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight: that you might be justified when you speak, *and* be clear when you judge. Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part you shall make me to know wisdom."

In verse 5, David did not write this to in any way intimate that he was conceived in his mother by means of an act of sin. Rather it is a poetic expression. It is a means of intimating that from the very get-go of his existence, the sinful nature of a man was part of that life.

This has practical ramifications toward understanding how deeply embedded this nature is in us. The nature invisibly provides the foundation and motivation for very much of the conduct of our life. It is an ever-present reality that we do not become fully aware of and concerned about until God reveals it.

Up until that time, it has had virtually full sway with our life; *it* has determined our pattern of living; *it* is what has set the character within us. It has had participation within virtually everything that we have done. Every day, even till this time, it is a reality that is ever with us.

We do not become wise (in a behavioral sense) until this truth is fully acknowledged and we begin to actively confront this impulse—that human nature within us—on a daily basis.

Even then, it is so deceitfully adept at convincing us to be imperfect, that Jeremiah explained that we would never fully grasp it! Did he not say that "the heart is deceitful above all things ... Who can know it?"

It is so interesting—as we grow in God's way, the more we are able to see and understand of God's nature and of His truth, the more we see human nature within us! That is why Paul says, "Oh wretched man that I am!"

In one sense, the more we see, the worse we see that we are! It is always there and it taints so much of what we do! That is what David was complaining about. From the very get-go of his life—from conception—it has been a part of our make-up.

Can we understand that it is always there, tainting what we are? We constantly need the grace of God because [sin] is undergirding so much of what we do, even though we are converted. We need the grace of God constantly.

Isaiah 55:6-9 "Seek you the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

I think it best that we consider this as being addressed to converted people because of the word "return" in verse 7. One cannot *return* to what one has never had in the first place.

The ancient Israelites never had a converted relationship with God. How could they return except in the most elementary manner? Old Covenant style—they could do that.

But if we understand this as being spoken by God to you and me, it puts the right spin on things because this was written to a people who had drifted away.

What we have to understand is that this is yet another area in which Christ must rescue us as we go along in our pilgrimage! Wherever and whenever we go on our conversion journey, we always take human nature with us.

The practical effect of that is that our thoughts can never reach God's! Our thoughts can never fully attain to the holiness of God's holiness! How can we possibly think thoughts that high, when they are accompanied by a base nature that is enmity against God?

We must strive for right thinking! It is good! But even at its very best, human thinking is not on the level of God's. It is not salvation.

4) **Denying ourselves is not salvation.** This can be another camouflaging area deceiving us.

The apostle Paul shows us that the heathen, in his day, were masters of this—denying themselves—and they had succeeded in persuading true church members into believing this heresy that accompanied their practice of self-denial.

Colossians 2:18-23 "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God. Wherefore if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances. (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the

commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh."

This approach was definitely from the pagans, but it struck a chord of believability in the Christians. It was believable because of things that had been said either by Jesus, or by Paul.

Matthew 16:24-26 "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what has a man profited if he shall gain the whole world; and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

So Jesus definitely said that we are to deny ourselves. The apostle Paul said something very similar. He wrote:

I Corinthians 9:24-27 "Know you not that they which run in a race run all, [that is, run all out] but one receives the prize? So run, [go all out] that you may obtain. And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate [self-controlled, disciplined] in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: [Paul says, "I don't shadow box"] But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

When we put everything together, we find that neither Jesus nor Paul is saying that discipline and self-denial is unnecessary. And Paul is not contradicting Christ when he wrote that in Colossians.

Denying the self and even possibly living ascetically is obviously necessary or we will never stop sinning! That is simple! We *do* have to discipline ourselves. We *do* have to deny ourselves, or we simply will not stop sinning. We will always pay attention to the pulls of the flesh and of the world.

Colossians 2:19 "And not holding the Head, from which the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

Basically what he is saying there is that the Christian should never, ever leave the relationship with Christ out of what he is doing, in order to discipline himself! Holding fast to the Head!

What he was getting at here (to help these people along) is that those people in Colossae (who were influencing them) were *not* taking Christ into consideration in their program of self-discipline, of denying themselves. They were missing the point.

This is the key to understanding what Paul's approach is here. Asceticism had deceitfully camouflaged these people's hope for salvation and shifted their hope from Christ, to their own works of denying themselves.

Paul goes on then to say that this program that they were involving themselves in was nothing but a form of the worship of demons! He does this in two ways.

One, which we will not get into here, is through the use of the term "rudiments of the world"—meaning the basic elements of the world. In his day and age that was an idiom for demons—"the elemental spirits"—as you will see this translated in some Bibles (in some translations).

The second thing he says is that it is a worship of angels. So twice he refers here to demons.

Paul is teaching us that we should look to Christ as the source of strength, to overcome sin or to increase in knowledge, virtue, joy, and salvation. He is the One who is feeding us! He is the Bread from heaven! And it is by *His* Spirit that we are to be led and guided.

Denying ourselves is important, but it does not give us salvation. Salvation is in and through a living Being with whom we have a relationship and who is far greater than any work of self-denial that we might do on our own, or even with His help.

5) This is somewhat related to number four, but it is broader and perhaps more serious. **Sacrifice, even the supreme sacrifice, is not salvation either.**

Romans 5:7 "[Paul wrote:] For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die."

Let us add to this something he wrote to the Corinthians:

I Corinthians 13:3 "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [love], it profits me nothing."

This is a somewhat different context than Romans 5:7, but the sense is the same in that Paul is showing that there are limits to the efficacy of even the sacrifice of one's life for another.

That is very clear in I Corinthians 13:3 —that love is more important than sacrifice.

Mankind holds the sacrifice of one's life for another as the greatest of all sacrifices, and that each one accomplishes at least some measure of good.

We can turn back to the Old Testament and again find that the principle of sacrifice has limitations to it.

In I Samuel 15, the principle of sacrifice is drawn from the sacrifices of Leviticus 1-5 and the spiritual principles that are involved in those sacrifices.

I Samuel 15:22 "And Samuel said [he said this to Saul], Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Our sacrificing has its limits.

The overwhelming majority of the time, God prefers a submissive life rather than death. There is a practical and legal reason for this. Dying for a great cause—the supreme sacrifice, if we should do it—is not salvation. It does not pay for our sins. Only Christ's sacrifice can do that because He brought with Him, to His sacrifice, a perfect life. His was a sinless sacrifice.

Even something as great as sacrifice does not, of and by itself, provide an open door to salvation. Jesus conclusively shows this in John 10:9 with a very simple statement:

John 10:9 "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

This perfectly agrees with what Peter said in Acts 4:12. There is no other means of salvation.

John 10:1 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that enters not by the door [Who is the door? Christ is.] into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."

We cannot 'steal' our way into the Kingdom of God.

Does any of this mean that sacrifice is not good and may even be required? ***Absolutely not*** ! We ***are*** required to sacrifice. The sacrifices of and by themselves are good, but we must understand that it is on *God's direction and terms that they become good*. Even then, our choosing to do so is *not* salvation.

Let us begin to tie this together.

Luke 17:5-10 "And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you might say to the sycamine tree, Be you plucked up by the root, and be you planted in the sea; and it should obey you. But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat [or food]? And will not rather say unto him, Make

ready wherewith I may sup, and gird yourself, and serve me, until I have eaten and drunken; and afterward you shall eat and drink? Does he [that is the master there] thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

Now there are a number of instructions in this brief parable. One of them is important to the theme of this sermon. We are going to connect this to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:10, a very familiar scripture, where he said:

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."

We are created in Christ Jesus and it is God who is doing the creating.

Before He called us (in fact we find in other places—before the creation of the world), He ordained the requirements for those that He called.

We were called to do works! They are required of us! But they do not give us salvation!

They have the power, if we allow it, to camouflage that fact and make us feel as though God owes us something because we are doing them! We are subtly tricked into believing that what He owes us is salvation. Very deceitful.

As the redeemed of God (you and me), He owns us. He can require of us whatever He pleases!

All of the areas that I mentioned—service, making changes, right thinking, denying the self, sacrificing ourselves—are forms of good works! Within the framework of each one, there might be hundreds of practical applications that can be made. They do not save us, but they are required of us.

They are things that God before ordained that we should perform following His deliverance of us by Jesus Christ, the Deliverer!

It was not until after our deliverance that God (our Creator and Owner), through Jesus Christ (our Mediator), enabled us to perform what He requires—by supplying us with all the tools that we need to do what He requires, even as He did with the Israelites in the wilderness.

There is no room for us to claim credit or to think highly of ourselves. There is room only for humility and honestly recognizing the truth—that our deliverance and performance to duty is overwhelmingly the work of God the Father creating in us!

Salvation is the work of Jesus Christ, not us.

In Luke 17, the parable is emphasizing the importance of why we do what we do and in what attitude they are done.

The parable is precipitated by Jesus' instruction regarding forgiveness and the high standard of forgiveness that is required; because Jesus in effect said that we are to forgive the repentant without stopping! There is no limit.

Those men were wise enough in their experience in the world and the teaching that they had already received from Jesus, for they saw that what Jesus was requiring of them was so high and elevated. They said, "Lord, increase our faith!" ("How can we ever do that?") They understood how easy it is to offend somebody and to be offended. So they ask astoundedly for help.

There is an interesting aside to this verse in a number of commentaries that I looked into. In Luke 17:6, they feel that there is only a part of an idiom here. In other words—Jesus spoke a little bit more than is actually here and that it is somehow missing.

They feel that it should read, ". . . and if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, and if you would [listen carefully to this word] *constantly* put it into practice, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'be uprooted and planted in the sea', and it would have obeyed you." The key word here is 'constantly'.

Like Luke 10:43 and I Thessalonians 1:10, it is indicating a *continuous action* of the use of faith—trusting God! Thus He is saying that no task required of us is impossible as long as we remain in trustful contact with our Creator and Deliverer! The problem is that we are usually not so consistent! Constancy is the foundation for good, required works, but it remains for us (the servant) to show in what attitude they are going to be done.

Now this is a second angle to this parable—the attitude part. The servant in the parable is clearly doing only what he is ordered to do. That comes out in the concluding statement—what Jesus said there.

So this servant is actually acting in a self-centered, coldly-calculated, and grudging way. 'I'll only do it if he tells me' obedience is given to finishing his chores. When he is told, he does what is required but it is done in a rather slavish spirit.

What Jesus is thus teaching is that that spirit, that attitude, will never impress God favorably and therefore produce an increase of faith as His gift. The grudging attitude does not recognize that it is God from whom all spiritual blessings flow and that the spiritual power to forgive, as Jesus instructed earlier, must constantly flow from an active, loving, relationship that humbly recognizes that the enabling to do the works flows from God.

So the grudging, slavish-spirit person is thinking that *he* is doing the works and wants full credit and recognition for doing only what is required of him anyway. He feels somewhat put upon and victimized. He is deceived about God and works.

Works are most certainly required. In one sense we might say that is the very reason for which we are called. Bad works got us into this mess. It takes the blood of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God and its enabling gifts—the constant surveillance of our Mediator, and a great deal of patient working with us by God—to produce the good works required of us.

Hebrews 10:29-31 "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was

sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

We absolutely cannot save ourselves, regardless of what we do. At the same time, we can disqualify ourselves as unworthy by refusing to do the works required of us—thus destroying the relationship and the salvation established by God's calling and gifts.

Throughout the year we emphasize overcoming, doing the works, striving to grow, service, sacrifice, denying the self, right thinking. But this season is sanctified for the purpose of focusing and re-establishing the central fact that salvation itself is not provided by these things, but hangs on God's mercy through Jesus Christ.

We have just read the verse that most clearly specifies the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin is the rejection of the Person and the work of Jesus Christ. Let us not ever forget this!

We must allow the Passover season to burn that into our consciousness—*that He is the one indispensable to our salvation and growth!* Though works are required of us, we must not allow them to camouflage those facts because it may cost us our salvation.