



CANADIAN CONFERENCE
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

ARTICLE 5 [MB Confession of Faith]

Salvation

COMMENTARY

Salvation is the most inclusive term used to describe God's program and action in response to the desperate needs of humankind and all the rest of the creation. Scripture accounts for and illustrates these problems beginning with the sinful actions of our first human parents. In our world we continue to see that humans are alienated from God, one another, their fellow creatures, the rest of creation, and even themselves. Just as sin is individual, corporate, and cosmic, so God's salvation addresses each area of God's purpose which has subsequently been damaged.

Salvation *From* and Salvation *To*

God saves from physical threats (Deut. 26:5-9; Matt. 8:25), from disease and physical maladies (Exod. 15:26; Ps. 103:3; Mark 5:28, 34; James 5:15), and from spiritual dangers such as God's wrath (Rom. 5:9-10), Satan (Acts 26:18; Eph. 6:11), and demonic oppression (Luke 8:36). The most common New Testament use of salvation, though, has to do with sin; indeed, Jesus' name was given because he would "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). God's people are saved from the penalty (Luke 7:48-50), power (Rom. 6:12-14), and practice of sin (1 John 3:9-10). It is instructive to recognize that the New Testament writers frequently employ the same terms for salvation from matters such as illness and demon possession as they do from sin (e.g. Luke 7:50; 8:48).

The goal toward which salvation works is described in Scripture by three major images. First, there is *liberation* or *liberty*. Freedom for the formerly oppressed enables them to fulfill the law by loving and serving (Gal. 5:1, 13-14). Second, an important part of God's liberty involves *health* and *wholeness* as evidenced by Jesus' ministry in these areas (Mark 2:17). Third, the term *shalom*, found especially in the prophetic writings, is used in descriptions of a peaceful and just society where people live together harmoniously and where "nation will not take up sword against nation" (Isa. 2:2-4, see also 9:6-7; 32:15-18; Mic. 4:1-4; Zech. 2:6-12).

Salvation in Christ

Christ is the true Savior sent from God (Acts 13:23), and salvation in the New Testament is described in terms of union with him. The believer is "in Christ" and thus a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). Christ is portrayed as the vine, with believers being the branches (John 15:1-10). Christ is described as the cornerstone of a building (Eph. 2:21-22), and as head of the body (Eph. 5:23). Furthermore, "Christ in you" is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27), and Paul can say that "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20 NRSV).

It is evident from all the above that God's salvation is holistic, embracing all that God originally intended for the entire creation, including that which was subsequently lost or damaged. Salvation encompasses both material (caring for the sick, hungry, naked) and spiritual matters (Mark 2:1-12). Jesus' earthly ministry demonstrates this breadth (Luke 4:18-21; Matt. 11:4-6), and he calls his followers likewise to embody it (Matt. 10:5-8; Luke 14:2-14).

Receiving Salvation by Grace through Faith

God's initiative in salvation is motivated by His unfathomable love (1 John 4:7-11). The term



grace is used to describe the marvelous reality that God freely saves, through no work or merit of their own, those who will repent, which means a radical turning from sin and turning to God (Acts 2:38; Eph. 2:8-9). Repentance involves a new attitude toward one's past life and actions, a rejection of trust in anything or anyone but Christ as Savior and Lord, and a commitment to behavior that reflects obedience to Christ.

Acceptance of God's gift of salvation, described as a "new birth" (John 3:1-21; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), occurs as individuals voluntarily receive it by faith. Whether a person is gradually nurtured through the believing community or experiences a crisis conversion, genuine faith indispensably involves each of the following: embracing a set of basic beliefs (John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:14-15), a commitment of trust in Christ and Christ's work (Rom. 4:18-25; Gal. 5:2-11), and actions which reflect such belief and commitment (James 2:14-26). Christ has instructed that those who become disciples should be baptized (Matt. 28:18-20). Mennonite Brethren understand this to be a public statement of identification with Christ and his body, and a symbolic act of receiving God's cleansing from sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We do not baptize infants because they are not able to make an informed choice for Christ and against the world and Satan.

God's grace not only accepts but also equips (Phil. 2:13) and transforms (2 Cor. 3:18) the believer and believing communities, who are then enabled to accept and serve others as God did them. The life of discipleship is not merely a response to God's salvation, but constitutes a "working out" of that salvation (Phil. 2:12). Scripture also exhorts that salvation must not be "neglected" (Heb. 2:3) but rather must be "held firmly" (1 Cor. 15:2). Believers have died with Christ in baptism so that as Christ was raised they "too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4 NRSV).

Salvation Involves Past, Present, and Future

The Bible describes salvation in terms of past, present, and future. The past, objective dimension is presented with the imagery of redemption (Deut. 13:5; Mark 10:45), justification (Isa. 43:25; Rom. 8:1), adoption (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1; Gal. 4:5-7), and reconciliation (Col. 1:21; 2 Cor. 5:19). These images are used of each believer's relationship to God, but they also (particularly adoption and reconciliation) reflect the corporate and communal implications of salvation for God's people. Salvation means that we are becoming a family (Heb. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:1), a body (1 Cor. 12:12-31), and a building (Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:4-6). We are breaking down walls of hostility between us and reconciling ourselves to one another (Eph. 2:14-16; Gal. 3:27-28).

This communal dimension is an important aspect of salvation's present, ongoing nature (Acts 2:47) and has been a consistent emphasis of Anabaptists regarding salvation. Jesus' teaching employed the images of new birth (John 3:3-7; 1 Pet. 1:23) and the new covenant (Luke 22:20; 2 Cor. 3:6; Jer. 31:33). The psalmist speaks of a continuing process in which hearts are made pure (Ps. 51:10). This experience of sanctification is also described in terms of a "new person" who puts off the old nature and puts on the new nature (Eph. 4:23-24) and is transformed by being renewed in mind (Rom. 12:1). By the power of the Spirit believers are expected to act differently as disciples of Jesus (Gal. 5:25) so that true faith is evident by outward actions (1 John 3:9; James 2:24).

At a future time God will bring this age to a close and complete the defeat of Satan and death (Rev. 20:10; 1 Cor. 15:26). God's complete salvation is therefore a future hope (Luke 21:28; Rom. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:8-9). Though suffering may come, "the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22; 24:13 NRSV).

A look to the future also alerts us to the cosmic dimension of salvation, when God will bring in the new heaven and the new earth (Isa. 65:17-25; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10). Scripture informs us that the purpose of all creation is to glorify God (Ps. 19:1; 69:34). While Jesus declares that human beings are worth more than the birds and the flowers (Matt. 6:26-30), he echoes the testimony of all Scripture that God cares for these creatures as well (Gen. 9:1-10, 12, 15, 17; Jon. 4:11; Hos. 2:18). The cosmos, presently "groaning" and "suffering," will one day be set free from slavery and the corruption it now experiences (Rom. 8:20-21; Isa. 11:6, 9).

In summary, salvation involves what God has already done, what God is doing, and the fullness God will ultimately bring.

