

## THE LOCATION OF SALVATION WHERE DOES SALVATION OCCUR?

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A memorable television commercial from the 1980's for Hanes underwear featured a gruff and portly older woman, known as Inspector 12. After stretching and snapping the elastic band on a pair of men's briefs, she scowled, "They don't say Hanes until I say they say Hanes!" A person may think that what he is wearing is Hanes, tell others he wears Hanes, and feels the comfort of one who actually wears Hanes. But the underwear is not Hanes unless Inspector 12 stamped it with the Hanes label.

What does this have to do with one's relationship to God? *Briefly* (pun intended) stated, many people, religious as well as not-so-religious, claim to be saved. They talk about "getting" saved. They claim to have had a "salvation experience," whatever that is. Disciples of a well-known sobriety society have been trained to speak in terms of "finding spirituality." Regardless, the bottom line with many is that they **FEEL** saved. In other words, they are comfortable in their condition (or in the shorts they are wearing). Consequently, they conclude, God is satisfied and accepts them. They base their conclusion, not upon what the Bible actually says, but rather upon their personal impressions regarding God's nature, which they have derived from multiple sources of influence.

One of the most prominent of these impressions is that the underlying foundation of God's nature is the characteristic of love. The idea is that God's love excuses, countenances, or at least accommodates sin. Some have a concept that God's nature of love is such that He strokes His beard and chuckles, "Boys will be boys" when confronted by sin. The logical conclusion one must draw from such a concept is that no one will be lost but that all will be saved.

The Bible **does** say God is love. But the *expression* of His love is governed by His holiness. Fundamentally, God is holy.

Others, however, reject such a purely subjective basis upon which to determine one's relationship to God, but appeal to *selected* and *isolated* Scriptures as the basis for their claim to salvation. From these selected Scriptures, they draw conclusions by extension that are not supported by Scripture.

Either way, the result is a salvation that is located in the individual's heart, originating in and emanating from his emotional state or intellectual rationale and deduction. This is a very serious error, for salvation originates and comes from outside the sinner. It is our thesis that the location of salvation is not in the human heart, but rather in the divine mind. One is not saved (i.e., justified) until and unless God says he is saved!

### **Justification is God's to Declare**

We come before the Judge of the Universe as guilty sinners, deserving His eternal wrath and condemnation. The purpose of our presence at the divine bar is not to determine our guilt — for that is a foregone conclusion (Rom. 3:23) — but to receive our sentence.

Justice demands that we suffer the consequences, which God's law stipulates to be the penalty of eternal death. But then the verdict comes down from the bench, "No penalty for you!"

This judgment has often been portrayed as being treated "*just-if-I'd never sinned*." But it is really being treated "*just-if-I'd already paid my penalty*." Our justification is based altogether on the reality that the penalty of death we deserved to pay was paid for us by Jesus Christ. His payment was credited to our account by the Eternal Judge, making it possible for Him to be just in declaring our release from the penalty (Rom. 3:26).

Romans 8:1 says there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. In that same context, Paul writes that it is God who justifies. Our salvation is located in or with God, not man.

Our justification is not based upon anything we have done, but solely upon what Jesus did at Calvary and in His subsequent resurrection, glorification, and continuing intercession. We are justified, not because we feel good about ourselves or because we are confident in our condition, but because God so declared, based upon our faith in Jesus' blood (Rom. 3:25).

This declaration is made in the courts of heaven. Yet many people seem to have the concept that justification is the ability to become right with God through some special arrangement they have made. The old country song, "Me and Jesus, We've Got A Good Thing Goin'," expresses the idea many people have that man can create his own

god who will negotiate and accommodate.

But what I am addressing is the common practice within religious organizations of creating a salvation message that is not found in the Bible.

The terms of pardon are not determined in the heart of each individual, as if we are at liberty to cook up our own terms for release.

### **Pardon is God's to Determine**

When a convicted criminal pleads for parole, he knows that the decision or outcome rests in the collective mind of the board that has reviewed his case. The same is true with regard to issuing a pardon. The determination is made in the mind of the governor, not by the convict. The prisoner has no voice in the terms of pardon.

The same principle holds true with regard to our salvation. God determines the basis upon which pardon is granted. The sinner is in no position to set the terms of pardon. This is the exclusive right of the Eternal Judge, Whose righteousness is offended by our sin.

Paul said he lived in all good conscience (Acts 23:1) before he was saved (Acts 22:16). Cornelius was a devout man and one who feared God with all his household (Acts 10:2) before he was saved. There are many devout people living with a clear conscience yet today who are not saved. Salvation is not determined by a clear conscience or devout practice.

Many of our friends and acquaintances are devout people living in all good conscience who are unwittingly propagating and perpetuating systems of salvation that have not come from the mind of God but from the minds of men. In their sincere desire to honor the Biblical teaching concerning salvation by grace through faith, they have adopted a plan of salvation that makes sense in their minds, but which is not revealed by the mind of God in the Scriptures.

One of the most common examples of this is the practice of praying what is referred to as "the sinner's prayer." This is a practice that devout people in all good conscience have created to serve as a substitute for the clear teaching of Scripture that salvation by grace through faith is received in baptism for the remission of sins. I have communicated with some leading advocates of these other systems of salvation, such as praying a prayer to invite Jesus into your heart. Their replies to my request for a Biblical

text that contains such a prayer or a Biblical example of anyone being saved by such a method have been consistent. Every one has stated that neither the prayer nor an example can be found in the Bible. Nor can they produce a Biblical reference where the language “invite Jesus into your heart” can be found.

Since God has neither commanded such a practice nor promised salvation as a result, we must conclude that this practice is displaying faith in man, not in God. The terms of pardon are God’s to determine. Sinners merely accept the terms, for they are in no position to set the conditions or terms by which they may be pardoned.

### **Salvation is God’s to Deliver**

Some other terminology people use in reference to salvation is troubling because it can communicate the idea that salvation occurs in their heart or mind. People talk about “getting saved,” or that so-and-so “got saved.” Salvation is not to be “gotten,” but given. Perhaps I make more of this than I should. But I don’t recall such language in the Bible. The Bible urges us to “be saved,” but never to “get saved.” Whether or not this issue about words warrants much discussion, the point to be made is that salvation is not initiated, engineered, or manufactured by man who makes it occur. Salvation is not something we can get. It is a gift we may receive.

The concept of grace itself is that of a gift that makes glad. Salvation may be obtained only as a gift from the One having authority to dispense it.

“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Titus 3:5-7 NASB

### **CONCLUSION**

The location of salvation is not man’s heart (his emotions, feelings, thoughts, or even convictions), but the mind of God, Who alone has the authority to declare a sinner free from the penalty of His law, or saved. One is not saved until and unless God says he is saved. From what the Bible teaches, only those who have consciously presented themselves for immersion into Christ as a saving work of God can be confident of salvation and inclusion as members of Christ’s body, the church. This assumes a

response preceded by genuine faith and repentance.

What about those who are convinced that God has saved them apart from immersion into Christ for the forgiveness of sin? We have no authority to give them assurance that they are saved. Nor can they know for sure that they are saved, for this is a conclusion they have reached without Biblical precept or example. Jesus revealed (Matt. 7:21-23) that many will stand before the Eternal Judge on the final day in heartfelt confidence. But He says the Judge will say to them, "I never knew you. Depart from Me."

Those who recognize their need for a confidence based upon what God says in His Word should respond in faith to His promise of pardon by presenting themselves in the water of baptism, calling upon the Lord to perform His work of salvation (Acts 22:16; Rom. 10:13). Those who have neither made a public profession of faith in Christ by a verbal confession that He is the Son of God Who came to take away the sin of the world nor been baptized into His death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection are urged to comply with the terms of pardon God established. To all we present the Bible answer to the question of what one must do to be saved: "Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38) NASB.

What is the location of your salvation? Is it your heart? Or is it God's mind?

*Note: I am indebted to Dr. Jack Cottrell, who has influenced me greatly, as evidenced throughout this article.*