

Works and Salvation

“And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).

Considering this scripture, mankind is brought to the reality of judgment. The Apostle Paul said, “For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). The Apostle Paul, said, “we:” do you not imagine that the “we” included his readers?

The Corinthians came from a varied background, morally and ethically. Paul said, “Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

I am well aware that a great debate is issued concerning the phrase “ye were washed.” There is a great deal of twisting and turning to deny, not only the simplest interpretation of the phrase, but also the consistent one, i.e., when Jesus told the apostles, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), thus, the Corinthians had obeyed that very command when they had been “washed,” “sanctified” and “justified,” “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” Nevertheless, here is a statement, concerning 1 Corinthians 6:11, made by a man, much more intelligent than I, and much more astute with the origins and meanings of words, i.e., R. C. Lenski: “Paul is of course speaking about baptism, but when he...names the effect of baptism, the spiritual washing away of all sin and guilt, the cleansing by pardon and justification.” Lenski says this term is the same as used by the Apostle Paul, saying, “For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). Thus, “with their own hearts the Corinthians themselves desired and accepted this washing and cleansing. In their case baptism was not a mere outward, formal, or only symbolic act. And what they desired they obtained: they were cleansed of sin and guilt” (Lenski).

Although there is a great cry to remove obedience from salvation, because it is said to be a work, and man is not saved by works, i.e., “We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28). The key to this understanding found in the phrase, “works of the law.” Paul didn’t say that works are not associated with salvation, he said “because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (3:20). To the man, no one will be justified because of his works, i.e., works of merit. Yet, James said, “Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith” (James 2:24).

Obedience is an essential element in connection with salvation. The Apostle Paul said, “Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18).

Remember the words of the Lord, saying, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).