

#0232 - March 24, 2009

Why We Believe What We Believe – Salvation Part 2

[Easley:] Probably at no point in the whole field of theological truth is the injunction more applicable when Scripture says, “Study to show yourself approved unto God. A workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.”

[Lepine:] This in *inContext* with Michael Easley, I’m Bob Lepine. We’re in the middle of a series called “Why We Believe What We Believe” and today we’re looking at our understanding of salvation. Yesterday, Michael, you referenced First Corinthians fifteen where Paul says, “This is the Gospel that I receive that I now deliver to you.” And I wonder if our listeners were asked, “Where would you go in the Bible to explain salvation to someone?” I wonder what they’d pick. Probably many of our listeners would go to Ephesians 2:8-9.

[Easley:] Right. Right.

[Lepine:] “By grace you’re saved through faith and it’s not of yourself, it is a gift from God.” And, in fact, that’s one of the points you emphasize in this message. We need to understand that salvation is not something that we earn, something we deserve or something that we merit; it is something that God graciously gives.

[Easley:] Perhaps it’s an oversimplification, Bob, but I make the distinction that world religions are essentially a system of dos and don’ts to somehow make yourself right or approved by whatever god they perceive. Christianity is not a system of dos and don’ts, it is a relationship with a person and that relationship can only begin as we understand the person and work of Jesus. And then, Christianity is not a system of dos and don’ts; it’s how do we live our lives as a result of what he’s done for us. It is a revolutionary concept to what it means to know God. That’s why Biblical Christianity is unique of all the world religions.

[Lepine:] And all of these doctrines that we’ve been looking at in this series are essential to understand correctly including the one we’re looking at today, the doctrine of salvation. Let’s listen together to part two of this message and here is our teacher Michael Easley.

[Easley:] When we were adopting our first child a neighbor that I barely knew walked across the street and handed me a check for a thousand dollars. It was the largest gift anyone had ever given me in my life. I was stupefied. I said, “Charlie! Why are you doing this?”

He said, “Martha and I love you.”

I said, “You don’t even know us.”

He said, “Oh, we’ve been watching you for about a year.” [Laughter]

Oh, got more earlier I guess. I don’t know, you know.

“Why would you do this?”

“We just love you.”

“What can I do for you?”

“Not a thing. We want to help you. It’s a *gift*. It’s a gift.”

It’s a gift. No good work earns a gift. Good works gain no attention before God before a person knows Jesus Christ. Let me say it again. No good work will gain God’s attention before you know Christ.

I was talking to a friend about this years ago thinking how do we communicate this in a clever way and he had a great illustration. He said, “Imagine that California is earth and Hawaii is heaven.”

That’s not hard to imagine, right? [Laughter] And imagine you’ve got to swim from California to get to Hawaii to be saved. Your ability to swim is not your physical prowess like some world class swimmer, like Esther Williams or someone, your ability to swim are your good works.

So, when the Chicago Marathon went, “Pow!” and everybody started down the street we had this big, “Ckkk!” from God. He says, “Go!” and all humanity on the edge of the California coastline starts to swim like crazy to go to Hawaii. Those who have the best works win. So, it’s probably politically incorrect to say this, but let’s just say it among friends. People like Hitler and Mussolini, we’re just stomping them on the beach as we go in the water. [Laughter] Because they’re evil, wicked, fall pot kind of people. Just kill them and go, right? I know it’s incorrect. We’ll erase it from the tape. It’ll be fine. [Laughter]

So then, as you’re swimming along, you’re going like crazy because you’ve got a few good works and there goes Mother Theresa, “Vroooooom.” [Laughter]

Nobody can swim faster than Mother Theresa! Can you see that blue and white thing?

“Vroooooom!” [Laughter]

I mean, just, you know, head above the water smiling, you know. [Laughter]

Maybe D.L. Moody’s out there swimming like crazy. Maybe Billy Graham’s walking on the water. [Laughter] Florence Nightingale’s floating over the water, I don’t know.

If good works get you to Hawaii, that’s whose coattails I’d want to be on, but good works get no attention from God prior to a person’s salvation. And Paul knew this when he wrote these words, men and women. He said, “It’s not a result of works.” And we all say, “Yeah. It’s a gift!” But look at verse ten:

For we are His workmanship

You were God’s work. Why? You were made to do a work. That’s what the verse says. Keep reading:

[Which] *God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*

He's separating works from salvation so clearly and we miss the verse entirely. You can't do it. You are a product of work and by the way, your works are what God designed you to do. Not for salvation, just to serve Him. The best way I can articulate it is your good works and mine are the way we say thank you to God for a salvation so rich and so free. Your good works and mine are a small way we say thank you to God for our salvation so rich and so free.

I have four children, you know, two of them are very grateful creatures. One of them still delights my heart to this day. They just say thank you for every little thing. They say thank you all the time. I remember getting this child a bike when she was four years of age. For like a week she said, "Thank you, Daddy. Thank you, Daddy."

The first day we showed it to her on her birthday she goes, this is her birthday, "Is this mine?"

She was stunned. She looked at it, she sat on it, she hugged, she kissed, she looked at it, she sat on it, she said, "Thank you." All along she goes, "Thank you for my bike. Thank you for my bike."

Now, do you know what it does to a father's heart when their child says thank you? There's no greater joy. Then you say, "What else would you like?" [Laughter]

I have two other children that I remind them often how grateful they should be. [Laughter] "You should be grateful!"

Now, put some shoe leather on this. Your Father in heaven who loved you when you were unlovely, who by grace through faith you appropriated salvation so rich and so free, He said, "You can't do anything that gets my attention. But here's a gift."

And you welcome that gift and you say the rest of your life, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. What do I do to show my thanks?"

"Do the good works I gave you to do."

"How do I show you thankfulness?"

"Do the good works I gave you to do."

There's not a thing wrong with good works, men and women. In fact, they're downright Biblical. Christ Jesus, He made you for good works that you should walk in them. Now, the reformation was really about this issue. The reformation was about, okay what do I have to do to get saved? Do I have to do some set of works so I can swim like Mother Theresa or do I understand that it is by grace alone, by faith alone? And this, of course, is what separated, perhaps the largest schism in so-called Christianity historically.

The law only proves wrong. The law of the one prohibition in Adam; do this; it's all over, anything else you can do. So what do we do? We do the one thing we can't do. "I'll give you ten commandments. See if you can manage those."

Can't manage those.

"All right. We'll give you three hundred," as the prophets continue to egg on and glom on. "How do you manage those?"

Very poorly. Law only shows what I do wrong, law never awards for doing right. Now, mingled in our bloodstreams is somehow we have this right, when we're caught – first of all, let's back up. When you and I sin and we know we're guilty, after we move from the blame casting and the defense mechanism, because we typically do. When we sin and we're found out we defend ourselves or we blame cast. Once we move beyond that, there's something in our conscience, our hearts, our mind that says, "You know what, I've got to do something right to fix this." Right?

Don't look at me like that! There's something in your soul that when you know you're busted you say, [big breath in] "What do I need to do now?"

That proves the law is incapable of producing good. All the law can do is show you how bad, it can't show you what to do for good. Luther said, "We're beggars all," right? I remember one of my professors in grad school said every year students would come back and confess they'd cheated on an exam.

I shared with you last year a person who wrote a letter to me. An octogenarian, a person in his eighties, who cheated when they were at Moody and with tears, wrote this long letter. And I called him and talked to him on the phone. It was one of those moments I slipped off my shoes talking to this man. It had broken his heart. How stupid could he have been? He loved the school so much. He felt he betrayed the school and he betrayed the Lord and we had a wonderful, wonderful talk.

My professor back in grad school said, "Every year someone comes back and says, 'You know, I lied. I cheated. I stole. I did wrong.'"

Now, this professor was very interesting. He sort of liked to let people squirm a little. He's sort of a sick guy. [Laughter] And as this person would kind of squirm in the office, cry and confess, the professor always said this. He said, "You know, that's the problem with sin. It makes a big mess and you can't ever clean it up."

And then he said, "This school has no policy on these things. We don't hold it over your head. We don't pull your diploma. And the fact that God's been working you over means more to me than anything. For my part, you're forgiven. God bless you. Stay strong. Keep short accounts. Next time you sin, just admit it right away and don't let it eat your lunch."

I was witness to a restoration service where two people had egregiously offended God in a church through some sordid affairs and divorces and remarriages and come back to ask for forgiveness and I heard a woman stand in front of a completely packed meeting room of probably two thousand standing along the sides say, "I have not had a decent nights rest in seven years because of my sin. I will walk over glass to get rid of the guilt."

I will never forget it as long as I live. Because when we sin there's something inside that says, "What do I do to get rid of the sin?"

The person and work of Jesus Christ is the only sufficient means for our sin condition. If there was another way to get saved, why would He have sent His Son?

I have a friend in another religious tradition that does all the rituals and all the merits and all the things you have to do and they say with clutched hands and broken hearts, "I know Jesus died for my sins, but I must do all that I can to atone for them."

And it breaks my heart they just can't see beyond the foolishness of good works before they've trusted Jesus Christ and the inefficiency of good works to secure or ensure their salvation. Justification, redemption, other terms become wet stones for how we understand this. How is a person made righteous? Romans three is a chock full chapter you should know inside and out. It's the wet stone, the sharpening, the concept of how we're made righteous. What justification by faith means. Justification is not just as if I'd never sinned. Never say that definition out loud around me. It's a horrible definition of justification. Justification is the work of Jesus Christ to declare you righteous. It's not just as if you never sinned. If Jesus Christ sacrificed life, death, burial, resurrection on the cross on Calvary, overcoming the grave, new life, able to say to His Father, "I paid for that. I justified them. I declare them righteous. They can't do a thing to get Your attention apart from me."

It's all about Christ in the beginning and the end. He's the only one who can provide our salvation so rich and so free. A good compression of a number of these ideas is in First Peter chapter one. I'll read verses three, four and five. First Peter 1:3-5:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again [God's mercy caused you and me to be born again.]

to a living hope through the resurrection of . . . Christ from the dead,

to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you

Do you think about your inheritance waiting for you? I've studied *kleronomian* and *kleronomias* and *kleros* and all of the tangent words about inheritance. I don't know what it means guys. But I will tell you this, somehow sewed into your salvation is this inheritance that is imperishable that awaits you and it's waiting for you in heaven. I almost see it like when you go into a really nice hotel there's a gift waiting there with your name on it. There's some spiritual inheritance waiting those in Christ. Verse five:

who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

So there's a current reality to our salvation and an ultimate reality to our future. Let me give you four final observations and then I want to read a very long quote that you will hopefully indulge me in.

Number one, salvation is only through innocent blood. Salvation is only through innocent blood. Hebrews 9:22.

Number two, salvation is only through a person. We have all kinds of illustrations, whether it's an advocate in a courtroom, whether it's a transplant operation for someone who's going to give an organ for you to live and die, there has to be substitution, there has to be a person.

Thirdly, salvation is only by grace. It is the means by which we're saved that God was gracious toward us.

And fourth, salvation is only through faith. The only way we appropriate it, the only way we embrace it, is to be in Christ Jesus by faith. To put your trust in Him to do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

That's what it means to believe, to trust, to have faith.

Now, I came across this accidentally. It's a 1945 quotation by Lewis Sperry Chafer. It breaks all the homiletical rules to read this long of a quote. I know that so the professors won't have to tell me later. I've tried to edit it down, I've tried to shorten it up and I said, "You know what, I'll just ask you all to listen and I'll try to read well."

"The preacher is an important link in the chain which connects the heart of God with the souls of lost men. Concerning all other links in this chain, it may be remarked that there is no deficiency in the provision of redemption through the sacrifice of Christ. There is no flaw in the record of that redemption revealed in the oracles of God. There is no weakness or failure on the part of the spirit. There should be no omissions, defects, derelictions, in the preacher's presentation of redemption to those for whom it is provided.

"When seriously contemplated, the responsibility of Gospel preaching cannot but solemnize the heart and be the cause of an ever-increasing dependence upon God. It is not to be wondered at that the apostle, speaking for the Holy Spirit, declares with that unique emphases of two-fold repetition but though we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than which has already been preached to you, let him be accursed.

"As we said before, so I say again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that you have received let him be accursed. Galatians 1:8-9.

"This anathema has never been revoked nor could it be so long as the saving grace of God is to be proclaimed to a lost world. From the human point of view a misrepresentation of the Gospel might be so misguided that a soul might lose his way forever. It behooves the doctor of souls to know the precise remedy for which he is appointed to administer. A medical doctor may, by error, terminate what is at best only a brief life but the doctor of souls is dealing with an eternal destiny. Having given His Son to die for lost men, God not cannot but be exacting as to the great benefit it is presenting nor should he be deemed unjust if he pronounces an anathema on those who pervert to one and only way of salvation.

"A sensitive man realizing these eternal issues might shrink from the responsibility so great but God has not called His messengers to such failure. He enjoins them, 'Preach to Word!' and assures them of His unfailing presence and enabling power.

“Probably at no point in the whole field of theological truth is the injunction more applicable when Scripture says, ‘Study to show yourself approved unto God. A workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.’”

You and I have the very Gospel of Jesus Christ; the one, the only means of salvation, how will you handle it?

[Lepine:] You know, this has been helpful to spend this time looking at the Gospel and the issue of salvation. In recent years I’ve tried to find a way to simplify this in my own mind so that I can more effectively communicate it to others. And I want you to check me on this.

I will say to others that the Gospel begins as an event that took place in time and in history; the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and that that had cosmic implications and that those cosmic implications can also be personal implications. That ultimately the affect of the Gospel for us is that it provides forgiveness of sin, transformation of our lives and a hope that we’ve never had. And that has seemed to be a helpful summary for folks to say, “That’s really what takes place when somebody looks at the historical event, understands what happened in the heavens as a result of that and now embraces it personally.”

[Easley:] I love it and I think in those times when men and women are alone, when they’re quiet, when there’s some problem they can’t resolve, there is this conscience bearing witness. There is this awareness that there is something out there, someone out there. And my firm belief is that God is calling men and women to Himself.

If you do not know Christ, if you have not come to that place in your spiritual curiosity, your investigation of world religions, whatever that means, our plea, our compulsion, our urgent message to you is that you would investigate the claims of Jesus Christ. What did He say about Himself? And, my friend, I’m convinced that if you trust in Christ and Christ alone, not only will He forgive your sins, give you purpose in life, give you an ultimate place in His kingdom for all eternity; He will give you a wonderful meaning on this planet while you are here. It’s the greatest gift ever given.

[Lepine:] Well, and again, if you want to understand these basic ideas of Christianity better, let me encourage you to go to our website, incontextradio.org and get information about the study guide that we’ve put together around this series called “Why We Believe What We Believe.” It comes with a CD that has mp3 files for each of Michael’s messages in this series and it comes with the *Moody Handbook of Theology*. Again, all the details are available on our website, incontextradio.org.

Michael, we ought to take just a few minutes here and update our listeners about some of the transition that has been happening here at Moody. And, in fact, you are in a new assignment in Nashville, Tennessee, right?

[Easley:] We are just outside Nashville in Brentwood at a great church, Bob, Fellowship Bible Church of the Nashville area, Williamson County to be precise. And I’m lead pastor here at the church. So, back in the pulpit, back opening the Word and having a great time living in middle Tennessee. So we’re enjoying it.

[Lepine:] And the plans are for *inContext* to continue even though you’re in this new

assignment, right?

[Easley:] Right. And we're thrilled about that. We're thrilled about Moody Radio allowing us to continue this. We'll change some stations and some formats and we'll do a little more on the internet in the days to come. And they can be redirected as they go to the *inContext* website; and more about that in the days ahead.

[Lepine:] So if you want to keep in touch with all that's happening through *inContext*, stay in touch via our website, incontextradio.org. And it's likely that most of these stations will be making some program changes over the next couple of weeks. So, again, find out more by staying in touch with us at incontextradio.org.

Now, tomorrow we're going to begin to look at what the Bible teaches about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and I hope you can tune in tomorrow for our next edition of *inContext* with Michael Easley.