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What Does It Mean to Be "Saved?"

By Tal Davis

Every field of endeavor has its own jargon. That is to say people in that discipline use words or phrases unique to that field. Often others outside that arena do not understand what they are saying. For instance, my son works installing "COWs" on cell phone towers. Obviously he does not carry large animals that give milk to the top of tall microwave transmitters. In his line of work a COW means Cellular On Wheels, which has something to do with maintenance of cellular equipment.

Sometimes a medical doctor will talk about "Cabbage." She, of course does not mean an ingredient in coleslaw. "Cabbage" refers to CBAG - Coronary Bypass Artery Grafting.

Or, perhaps you or someone you know has undergone a "PET SCAN." No, that does not mean an X-ray of your favorite feline (that would be a CAT SCAN). It is short for Positron Emission Tomography.

One of my favorites is a phrase I learned years ago when studying psychology. One of my instructors, in describing human relationships, used the term "Undifferentiated Ego Mass." Believe it or not, that is the technical term some psychologists use for what most of us call LOVE.

We laugh, but we must admit that Christians also use jargon to describe what we believe. We use technical theological words like these: Justification; Sanctification; Propitiation; Sacrificial Atonement; Redemption; Glorification; imputation; etc.

Another term we use all the time in evangelical circles is the simple word "SAVED."

As a teenager I was asked by a friend: "Are you saved?"

"Uh, I guess," I answered. The truth is that I was not saved, but I didn't really know what he meant. Of course, I now know exactly what he had in mind. Nonetheless, I think most non-Christians, and even some Christians, do not understand the full meaning of what it is to be "saved."

So our question for this article is: "What does it mean to be SAVED?"

Webster's dictionary defines that word in this way: "To rescue or deliver from danger or harm; to put aside as to store or reserve." This definition can be used many different contexts. Here is list of some of them:

* The "Mighty Mouse" context - "Here I come to save the day!" Mighty Mouse would swoop down singing just in time to "save" Pearl Pureheart from evil Oilcan Harry.

* The "Dr. House" context - The patient was "saved" from dying by the diagnosis of the psycho Dr. House.

* The "Bay Watch" context - The gorgeous lifeguards "saved" or rescued the man from drowning (he was probably faking).

* The "Craig Kimbrel" context - The relief pitcher came in from the bull pen (how did he get in there?) and "saved" the game with his 99 mph fastball.

* The "Piggy Bank" context - The child "saved" her money to buy a Jesse the Cowgirl doll (if you don't know who Jesse is, ask a five year old).

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* The "Thanksgiving Day" context - The turkey leftovers were "saved" for sandwiches to eat later during the football games (the turkey wished Mighty Mouse had saved him).

Obviously, none of those examples are adequate comparisons to the Christian context of the term. Nonetheless, Webster's definition can be a useful answer for understanding how we are "saved" in the biblical sense. In that context we are indeed "saved" both from something and "saved" for something. It is important that every person understand the TWO dimensions of what it means to be saved according to the Bible's teaching and, most important, what it means to him or her!

In his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul used the term "saved" twice in chapter two, verses 1-10.

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one

may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (NASB)

From this familiar passage we can discern the two important biblical dimensions of the meaning of the word "saved."

Dimension 1- What We Are Saved From

Paul indicates we are saved from sin! In verses 1-3 he states that we were "dead in trespasses and sins." "Sin" is another word that is not always clearly defined or understood. It has a deeper meaning than just referring to specific bad acts. It really reflects an attitude of rebellion or indifference toward God. "Sins" are outward expressions or manifestations of the inner attitude. In reality, despite what humanists and liberals may want to believe, our human nature is sinful. We are not basically good but we are born "bad to the bone."

As a result, the sinner is subject to three evil sources of temptation. In verses 2-3 of the above passage Paul highlights three enemies of God. First he mentions... "the course of this world" (vs. 2). In this sense Paul means the systematic evil that often affects every aspect of human endeavor including government, business, education, entertainment, and even religion.

In verse 2, as well, Paul mentions... "the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." He is obviously referring to the devil, that is Satan the Adversary. Paul elsewhere calls him the "god of this world" (1 Cor. 4:4).

In verse 3 he warns of... "the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind." It is our own human desires and lusts that also en-

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Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:

info@marketfaith.org

Phone: 850-383-9756 (Tallahassee, Florida)

Fax: 850-514-4571

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tice us to sin. "Flesh" refers to the innate sinful nature that burdens us until we will be liberated finally when Jesus's returns.

So what is the result of all this ugliness? Simply put, it is death (vs. 1). This death Paul talks about is both now a reality but also describes eternity. It is alienation from God in this life and forever in Hell. (We will look more at the meaning of being "lost" in my next article.)

So, this is what we are saved from: the terrible curse of sin and its consequences. This is the essence of the Gospel: the Rescuer is Jesus Christ. He is our Savior (the one who saves)! By His death on the cross and resurrection we can have assurance that we (1) can have a measure of victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil in this life, and (2) know we will go to heaven when we die to live eternally with Jesus in the presence of God. As Paul asserts in verses 5, 6, and 7, God has..."made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ." (NASB)

But that is only part of what our salvation accomplished. We are also saved for a positive purpose.

Dimension 2- What We Are Saved For

Paul indicates that we are saved for abundant life and to serve God forever. In Ephesians 2:5 he explains that we are already "made alive" by grace. We are already raised up and are seated with Christ.

Verses 8 and 9 are familiar ones to most evangelical Christians. Paul declares that we were saved by GRACE thru FAITH. He further says

it was a gift and not because of any kind of good works. But he does not stop there, for in verse 10 he says we were saved in order to do good works. The good works are the consequences of our salvation, not its cause.

When we put our full trust in Jesus Christ we are restored to enjoy life abundant. This life has two aspects: present and future. In the present it provides a life of meaning, purpose, and service. Our life here, however, is only a preparation for eternity... "the ages to come."

So then, what does it mean to be saved? First it means to be rescued from sin and its consequences. It also means to be set aside to serve God, both now and forever. In both cases, we are indeed saved by God's love and grace. It is a free gift we cannot earn. Nonetheless, each person must make the personal decision to repent of his or her sin and put his or her faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Only then can we really know what it means to be saved.

In the next installment we will examine what it means to be "LOST."

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