

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-08-23—SALVATION IS SIMPLE—LIVING IT IS HARD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Have you ever wondered why 3,000 people were baptized in ONE DAY as mentioned in Acts 2:41? This is quite the contrast from today when many prospective converts are required to go through some form of 'counseling' for a year or more. The answer is that salvation from God is very simple and not hard to understand:

SALVATION¹: The free gift of salvation requires 1) repentance of sin in faith that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ brings remission of sin, 2) being buried with Him into His death through the symbolic act of water-immersion baptism in the name of Jesus, and 4) receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying-on of hands by an elder.

Baptism is then the beginning of living life as a new creation 1) that is dead to sin, 2) under the grace of God, 3) keeping The Law of God (all the statutes, precepts, testimonies, and judgments), 4) growing and becoming agape love by the works of God through the Holy Spirit, and 5) doing Good Works (the Ministry of Giving and Receiving) to all mankind but especially to those who are of the Household of God as God gives the opportunities and means.

You probably already know this, so why talk about it? First of all, too many think that salvation is a complicated subject. If someone asks them to explain salvation, the usual response is to hand them a 50-page booklet that they themselves have not read. Those who think salvation is hard to understand could be an indication that their "minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Second, Pronomians—those who believe salvation is through Law-keeping—fail to understand that the "purpose of the commandment [*Law-keeping*] is [agape] love out of a pure heart" (1 Tim. 1:5; also Rom. 13:8-10.) They rarely consider anything beyond the Two Great Commandments and the Ten Commandments. Their eyes glaze over when they discover that The Law includes all of the statutes, precepts, testimonies, and judgments in the first five books of the Bible (the Torah).

Third, Antinomians—those who believe salvation does NOT require Law-keeping—emphasize love but reject any notion that keeping The Law is required. They wrongly believe God's grace eliminates The Law. They, too, fail to understand that the "purpose of the commandment [*Law-keeping*] is [agape] love out of a pure heart."

Finally, some think that salvation comes only by 'believing in the name of the Lord Jesus' but this is out of context with Scripture, which demands much more. It omits both Law-keeping AND agape love. Belief is clearly insufficient because James told the 'Lost' Ten Tribes that "Even the demons believe and tremble!" (Jas. 2:19). Obviously, belief is not enough because demons do not have salvation.

¹ **NOTE**: There are too many proof scriptures to list so the words highlighted bold and underline are keywords that can be used to verify this definition. All of them can also be found in Sabbath Thought articles and booklets on the website.

The hard problem is actually BECOMING agape love and DOING Good Works. Often we assume that people are being judgmental or rude when they do not respond as we expect. (Why is it so hard to assume the opposite?) For example, it is frustrating when we need help from a company. We start with an email or text because they make it hard to find a phone number so we can talk to a real person. If we actually find a phone number and finally get through the menu to talk with a real person, they usually have a thick accent making them hard to understand. On the flip side, they also have trouble understanding us.

Did you know that AARGH is actually a word in the Oxford Dictionary? It describes situations like this perfectly. This happens because we do not always wear 'Bible glasses' that allow us to see as God sees when we are out just living life. They allow us to see what others are going through with customers like us who only make it worse. Most of all, 'Bible glasses' remind us that these people are the focus of the great finish to God's Plan. Not now, but soon. I sincerely hope to be in the First Resurrection but the main purpose of the Firstfruits is to help bring many sons and daughters into the family of God—the Grand Finale. We are a very tiny fraction of all the future children in the Kingdom. So, God is NOT focused on us; His plan is much, much bigger than a few people. 'Bible glasses' allow us to see that God has scheduled them for a different time.

But there are also times when things are reversed. Brethren have been rejected because of lies and bias. I have received hateful emails about a few of my articles. It is hard to 'turn the other cheek' so they can do it again but that is what Jesus requires. Again, wearing 'Bible glasses' help us remember that He was beaten far, far worse than any of us. Above all, He bore it all FOR us.

Salvation is simple to explain, living it is hard. How nice it would be if salvation was simply a matter of 'believing in the name of the Lord Jesus' because I can BELIEVE all day long. The problem is that believing is no more than what the demons do.

The failings in living our lives stem from what the Bible calls judgment—the rendering of decisions about another person. But there is a difference between our judgments and God's. We make negative or even vindictive judgments but God renders RIGHTEOUS judgment. What is that? If you had asked me that question twenty years ago I would have said it is judgment according to The Law. But that falls FAR short of the righteous part of judgment.

I was taught early on that "all your [God's] **commandments [The Law] are righteousness**" (Ps. 119:172). While absolutely true, it is a purely Nomian view (strict letter of the Law). Why? If God is agape love² AND He is righteous, then righteous judgment is more than Law-keeping—it has to include agape love. It is quite simple to prove this:

ROMANS 3:21-22 But now **the righteousness of God apart [aside] from the law is revealed**, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even **the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all** and on all who believe. ...

² 1 John 4:8, 16.

The righteousness of God is revealed (made known) APART from The Law and proof of His righteousness comes through our FAITH in Jesus Christ. How?

ROMANS 3:24, 26 *[We] being justified [judged to be righteous] freely [a gift, without cause] by His [God's] grace through the redemption [ransom] that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation [means of obtaining forgiveness] by His [Jesus Christ's] blood through faith, ... 26 **to demonstrate [prove, declare] at the present time His [God's] righteousness, that He [God] might be just [one who IS righteous] and the justifier [the one who makes righteous] of the one who has faith in Jesus.***

We were all condemned to death for our sins because The Law convicted us as criminals (transgressors)³. However, God paid a ransom for our lives by sacrificing His Son AFTER we were convicted and sentenced to death. How does THAT somehow prove the righteousness of God? And how is God's righteousness more than strict Law-keeping? If righteousness is simply Law-keeping then according to The Law, God would not have sacrificed His Son and just cast everyone into the Lake of Fire because that is what The Law REQUIRES of God. But His righteousness is more than strict Law-keeping because He SACRIFICED His Son out of love so that He can JUSTIFY us—judge us to be perfect and sinless. In other words, God sacrificed Jesus Christ so that He could expunge our criminal record and deem us to be not guilty. We are now innocent because God IS love.

The only reason God would extend such mercy and compassion to mankind is BECAUSE His righteousness is far more than strict Law-keeping—He judges those He loves with mercy and compassion! This is also why God is the Judge of all⁴ through Jesus Christ⁵ to whom He has committed ALL judgment⁶. He judges all according to the Law with mercy and compassion for our sinful flesh⁷ out of love. But most of all, “the law made nothing **perfect**” (Heb. 7:19) because perfection IS agape love, not Law-keeping:

COLOSSIANS 3:14 But above all these things **put on love**, which is **the bond [principle] of perfection**.

ZECHARIAH 7:9 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘**Execute true justice, show mercy [Heb. hesed = covenant loyalty and devotion] and compassion** everyone to his brother.

MATTHEW 23:23 “... **the weightier matters of the law [are] justice and mercy and faith**. ...

Mercy and compassion are foundational to righteous judgment and together these establish true JUSTICE. Without mercy and compassion no one could enter into the Kingdom. This is the reason mercy and compassion triumph over judgment:

³ Jas. 2:9.

⁴ Heb. 12:23.

⁵ Rom. 2:16.

⁶ John 5:22.

⁷ Rom. 8:3.

JAMES 2:12-13 So speak and so do as those who will be **judged by the law of liberty**. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. **Mercy [compassion] triumphs over judgment**.

The more we wear 'Bible glasses', the more we will have mercy and compassion and the better we will understand why our judgment is so UNrighteous compared to God's. For example, very few criminals or child abusers chose to be that way. Most learned those behaviors from their own parents. The same is true of those filled with anger, hate, and malice—no infant is BORN that way. Yes, eventually everyone is responsible for who they are and what they will become. However, I hope you will agree that it is impossible for flesh and blood to righteously judge a child abuser who was also abused as a child. Even through 'Bible glasses', judging someone who deliberately hurts others is hard. It requires discerning the "thoughts and intents of the **heart**."⁸ Who can do that perfectly? This is why judgment is in the hands of God and Christ⁹. WE have received mercy from God so we need to extend mercy to others but that is hard for flesh and blood to do:

LUKE 6:36-37 Therefore **be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful**. 37 **"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.**

Talking to the Pharisees, Jesus told them NOT to pass over "**justice [the rendering of righteous judgment] and the love of God**" (Luke 11: 42) because true justice requires mercy and compassion—elements that come only from agape love. Even those who are condemned to eternal death in the Lake of Fire will receive righteous judgment with mercy and compassion because a heart consumed with anger, hatred, and malice is a terrible way to live.

How hard is it to show mercy, compassion, and love to others? Okay, yes, it can be really hard. The question is really what PREVENTS us from doing it? Most live in peace and abundance. Still, it is easy to forget our 'Bible glasses' when we step out the door into a world that is all too easy for US to judge and condemn. But that changes when we stop judging OTHERS and judge OURSELVES according to His mercy and compassion. RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT FOR US IS NOT JUDGING WHAT **OTHERS** LACK, IT IS JUDGMENT ACCORDING WHAT **WE** HAVE RECEIVED. We "**receive abundance** of grace and of the gift of righteousness"¹⁰ because "we have **received mercy**."¹¹ In short, salvation is simply becoming agape love as God IS—living the way of agape love is hard.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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⁸ Heb. 4:12.

⁹ Heb. 10:30-31.

¹⁰ Rom. 5:17.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 4:1.