

SALVATION IN THE REFORMED TRADITION

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the Great Synagogue, Sydney on June
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Salvation may be viewed both as a present experience and as a future hope.

As a present experience salvation consists of a new relationship with God as our Father. It is a direct personal and intelligent fellowship or friendship with God. He speaks to our inward spirit words of comfort or correction or words of joy and so on. We respond with a conscious personal response, of adoration, thanks, faith, obedience and so on. It is a personal relationship, person to person and it is the result of God's own presence, His Holy Spirit given to us in accordance to his promise, for example in Joel, Ezekiel and Zechariah, and in the New Testament. Salvation so experienced naturally involves a change of heart. God cannot have a relationship as a friend with a person who is self-centred and rebellious but God takes away the hard heart and gives us a heart to love Him and to love our fellowmen in a way we do not do by nature. This present experience of salvation may be described as being in heaven now, for we are already in God's presence through His spirit present in our life and heart. He speaks to us through His word and we respond in the totality of our personality as we respond to a friend. This is the way Abraham, Moses and David for example, experienced God's presence and it is now the experience of every true christian. There is no place for intermediaries in this experience, whether the intermediary is the Church or the priesthood or the saints or the Mother of God. One cannot have human friendship through a third party and it is impossible to be related to God in a personal way except directly through His spirit present to our spirit.

Viewed as a future anticipation salvation is deliverance from the coming wrath on the day of

judgement when God will judge everyone according to their works. For those who are saved, the day of the Lord will be a day of joy and vindication, it will be springtime after winter when God's people will be as calves let out from the stall to graze in the spring pastures, to quote imagery from Malachi.

Salvation is based on complete forgiveness of sins. As God looks at us He sees no sin, He has put them all behind His back, drowned them in the depths of the sea, removed them from us as far as the East is from the West, to quote some Old Testament metaphors. God justifies us, that is He declares us to be in the right and so we are able to enter freely into His presence which is salvation.

This forgiveness on which salvation is based comes to us as a consequence of our sin being borne for us by Jesus. God Himself has borne our sins. This makes forgiveness ethical for it is against God that we have sinned, and He Himself has accepted and endured consequential penalty so that we may be freely forgiven. In a word our salvation rests on the fact that Jesus Christ is divine. As Isaiah said, "Unto us a child is born, and His name shall be mighty God, Everlasting Father," From another point of view our forgiveness is based on the complete obedience of Jesus our sin bearer, who, truly God, was at the same time true man, our brother, the son of David. Alone of men he has completely fulfilled the law, which we are all bound to do but do not. He has thoroughly overcome all temptation and defeated our spiritual adversary, which we are all obligated to do but do not. And He has completely identified Himself with us as He has willingly undergone the penalty for sin, the curse of God, on all who do not walk in everything written in the book of the law to do it, a curse which we all deserve but from which we have been delivered

by His lovingly bearing it and enduring it and exhausting it for us. He is true man and so is able to be our sacrifice and substitute. "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all, and with his stripes we are healed". It is through our identification with Jesus that we share his reward of being received as man into God's presence and friendship, for he identified himself with us in sharing our desert of doom, and abrogating it by his perfect obedience.

We receive this salvation provided by God as a gift from God. It is a gift of righteousness, that is of right standing in God's sight, a gift of forgiveness and of restoration to God's presence. It is entirely a gift and is not based on our merits, deservings or the quality of our moral life even in the slightest. Our moral life flows from this new relationship and is not the cause or ground of that relationship. The cause is God's love and gift, the ground of the gift is the obedience of Jesus our sin bearer. We enter into this state of salvation and restoration to God's presence through faith in God. Faith in God has always been the principle of a relationship with him. Thus Abraham believed God and God accepted him. Our faith is the same as Abraham's but we are in a position to know more fully the nature of God through the revelation of the life and work of the Messiah the Son of God. If we respond to God by faith in him he saves us, forgives us, restores us to his presence. In a word as Joel predicted those who call upon the name of the Lord are saved by the Lord, now and for ever.

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