

Soteriology

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Salvation in the Orthodox Concept - HH Pope Shenouda III

Dangers of "One Single Verse"

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31)

- This verse might be used as "proof" that all that is required for salvation is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ
- But that would be taking the verse out of its context - who was it spoken to? Who was it spoken by? What else in the Scripture discusses this concept?
- The foolish person would base his whole concept of salvation on this one verse. But the wise person would look at this verse's context in the book of Acts, and its context in the whole scripture (since the Word of God is not mere verses, but breathes and is backed by a living Spirit)
- What could this verse mean?
 - This verse was spoken to a Gentile - if the apostle Paul had preached to him to do good works, they would have benefited him nothing because he did not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. If he was speaking to a Christian who already believed in Christ, he would have given him a different message
 - St Paul is conveying to him the first step and this happens often in Scripture
 - Simeon the elder said "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation." Did he see the salvation? Did he see the Cross? Definitely not. But he saw the first step.
 - When Zacchaeus said that he would give back four times what he had stolen, the Lord told him "Today salvation has come to this house." The repentance of Zacchaeus was just the first step toward salvation.
 - "You will be saved, you and your household" - Why would his household be saved by him believing on the Lord Jesus Christ? Again, it's simply the first step. He will still convince his household to also believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their first step, and then they will take the next steps together.
 - The next verses: "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household." (Acts 16:32-33)

- He and his family were baptized! If St Paul literally meant that all you have to do is believe on the Lord Christ and declare your belief and have faith, why would he then go and baptize them?
- Other verses about salvation say other things... even from the Lord Christ, Himself!
 - A young man came to the Lord and asked "what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" - the Lord did not say "believe and you will be saved" - He said "keep the commandments" and when the young man pressed for more, the Lord told him "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (Matthew 19). The Lord was giving him a message that was specific to him and to his weakness. Does this mean faith is not necessary? Certainly not. Every situation requires a suitable answer.

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God..." (Romans 5:1)

- This verse seems clear... it's explicit. How can we deny it?
- We don't deny it, but we place beside it another verse from the same epistle:
 - "For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified." (Romans 2:13)
- We add to it another verse:
 - "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." (James 2:24)
- We cannot say that it is only by works we are saved, neither can we say that it is only by faith.

"But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Romans 2:5)

- Does this mean that God justifies the ungodly when they continue in their ungodliness? God forbid
- Add to it other verses:
 - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." (Romans 1:18)
 - "... condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly" (2 Peter 2:6)
 - *"Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way." (Jude 14:15)*
 - *"Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites... will inherit the Kingdom of God"*

It is not proper at all to follow this manner of using one single verse only... It is wrong and dangerous besides being unorthodox.

If anyone presents you a certain verse, however explicit and plain it may be, say to him: "One verse is of no use to me. Let us bring together all the texts relating to the subject, then we can argue."

No Salvation Except Through the Blood of Christ Alone