



Forget About “Getting Saved”

My friend Bill knows I am a Christian, so I didn’t think he would try to evangelize me. Bill doesn’t know it, but being evangelized is, on the scale of experiences I would rather avoid, roughly equivalent to having a root canal. Our conversation started out about God’s grace. At the beginning of our conversation, I could tell that Bill was caught off guard when I told him that I am an *irreligious Christian*.

At that point it seemed that Bill started bearing down, the conversation taking on the adversarial tone of him evangelizing (saving) me. His barrage of questions reminded me of the interrogations political appointees must endure before a Senate subcommittee.

Bill started his probe to see if I was a real, true Christian (or just a fake one) by asking if I believed we are living in the end times.

“Bill, I never go to bed wondering if I will be raptured as I drive to work in the morning.” My answer obviously troubled him. His expression told me that my failure to hop on the end-times bandwagon meant my rating as a “true Christian” had slipped, in his estimation.

He changed the subject radically—telling me when and where and by whom he was baptized, and how much water was used. He paused, as if to say, “And how about you?”

I told him about my two baptisms—one as an infant, with a little water, and one as an adult, completely submerged in enough water to drown me. He didn’t seem happy about the infant baptism, but was relieved that I had set the record straight by being fully immersed.

“Greg, I know that you are really committed to writing and teaching about God’s grace. I think it’s good to preach God’s grace, but I am concerned that you don’t tell people that they need to have good morals and do the right things. Sometimes I wonder if you *really* are saved. When exactly did you get saved?”

“Getting” Saved?

Let me share a condensed version of my answer to Bill with you.

I prefer not to describe the beginnings of my relationship with God as “getting saved.” I have never met a young bride-to-be who explained that she was marrying the man of her dreams so that he would save her from horrible torture to which he would otherwise subject her.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus died for us on the cross, as the greatest-ever demonstration of sacrificial love. I reject the idea that some teach—that Jesus had to go to the cross to appease the anger of the Father. That’s part of this whole wrong-headed thinking about “getting saved.”

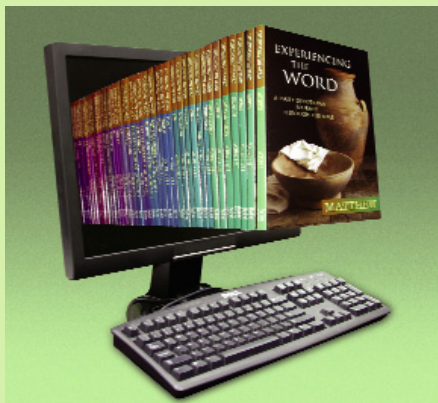
The Bible teaches about God’s love for us. Jesus does not threaten us with eternal torture to which we will be subjected if we don’t respond to God’s love in kind. The Bible teaches that *God loves us just as much right now as he ever has or ever will*. His loving relationship with us does not depend on *our* behavior.

This love relationship of God is further described in the New Testament as our adoption, when God pronounces us, without any merit on our part, because of Christ and by his grace, heirs of the very kingdom of heaven. I just don’t see how “getting saved” from being tortured is any part of this relationship. Jesus tells us we are not his servants, but his friends. We are given citizenship in God’s kingdom.

It seems to me the vast majority of biblical illustrations about the change that occurs in our lives when we accept God’s amazing grace are based on *our relationship with God*. How did people, in God’s name, start talking about “getting saved?” Saved from what—or whom?

Yes, I know the standard answer. We are saved from our sins. We are, as sinful men and women, alienated from God, and the wages of our sin is death. I agree. But what happens if we are *not* saved from our sins? We are lost. Lost—in what way?

Here’s the bait-and-switch Christ-less religion has devised. If we are not saved, then



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commentary

we are lost and we will fry. If God doesn't save us, he will torture us. Without this religious club, Christless religion believes it won't have the motivation to persuade people to show up at church and do all the right things.

I don't believe we need to fear the hell that religion says God will condemn us to. I believe we need to consider the hell which we choose. Hell is our choice—not the pronouncement of God who is so offended and scandalized that he tells us, "I've-had-it-up-to-here-with-you!"

The basis of the "relationship" religion convinces us that we have with God is *fear*. It's all about guilt and shame. It's all about another god—as Paul says, "a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all" (Galatians 1:6-7). The biblically bogus idea behind "getting saved" proclaims another god altogether. "Getting saved" is, in my view, a wrong-headed view that obscures the real relationship God offers us.

"What Good Thing Must I Do To Get Eternal Life?"

That question is in the Bible, but Jesus didn't ask it. He didn't teach four spiritual laws or have the disciples memorize the "sinner's prayer" which would "save" them. Jesus did respond to the young man whose perspective was that he could merit eternal life, and wanted to know what additional things he needed to do to cover his spiritual bases (Matthew 19:16).

The young man was asking the wrong question, but then, given his religious orientation and training, it was an understandable question. In the same way, given the religious legalism endemic within Christendom, it's understandable that many people talk about when they "got saved" and are filled with zeal to make sure others "get saved" too.

But it's the wrong question. Many people today say we must "get saved" because of our sins, and if we don't, then we will be lost, which

means eternal torture (at the hands of the same God who will save us).

Where do we see such selfish motivation used in the New Testament? Jesus told the young man that he needed to be saved from the idea that he needed to "get saved." *Jesus essentially said that we need to be saved from religion!*

"Getting saved" is used by Christless religion to control people and maintain the religious status quo. Legalistic, authoritarian religion puts people into artificially emotionally-distressing situations, reduces the trumped-up dilemma to a simple mantra ("getting saved"), and then subjects the new "convert" to a regulated life, mandated by religious leaders and rules.

"Getting saved" is an appeal to individuals so that they can "get" something for their benefit. "Getting saved" does not compare favorably with the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Just what did Jesus teach?*

You want to live eternally? *Die to yourself. Sacrifice your own desire to save your own neck. Serve others.* (See Matthew 10:39).

You want to be the best—the first—you want to be in charge? *Be the last. Forget about being served, and instead serve others* (Matthew 20:26). *Become like a little child* (Matthew 18:3-4). *Consider others better than yourselves* (Philippians 2:3). He didn't say "get saved."

You want to "get saved?" Lose the religion. Surrender the ideas, appealing as they may be, that you can gain God's favor on the basis of *your* good deeds. Give up trying to "get" what you think you need, and instead trust God to give you what he already has. Set aside those spiritual accomplishments you believe entitle you to "get saved." You will never "get saved" on the basis of religion.

Salvation is given, imparted and awarded—not achieved, earned or merited. There is no question that we need to "get saved"—we need to get saved *from* religion, *for* relationship with our loving, gracious God. □

—Greg Albrecht

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