

Salvation and Church Membership

Introduction:

- we all agree that the proclamation of the Gospel is still part of our mission as a church – yet we also feel that it doesn't go as smoothly as it maybe used to go
 - I believe that we all have the desire that – among other things – our churches will again engage in the proclamation of the Gospel

 - salvation – different aspects, a separation of which is somewhat artificial – yet, if we think of how to help someone to become a Christian we can maybe identify two main tasks:
 - a. supporting the person in getting to know Christ and in building a relationship with him – we would probably all agree that this part is very central
 - b. teaching the person why salvation is needed and how to get saved
 - in this lesson I want to focus only on the second of the two
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- One becomes a part of the church by being incorporated into the body of Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit – this is equal to „being saved“
 - The church may be defined as the community of the saved
 - Acts 2, 47: Those who are saved from their sins are added by God to the number of his people
 - **1. Pet. 4, 17f**: Here the church is contrasted with those who are lost. The „family of God“, the church, the „righteous“, are saved, but no hope is given to those „who do not obey the Gospel of God“

 - viewpoints in the religious world:
 - the church saves (Roman Catholic)
 - Protestants in reaction to this separated salvation and church membership
 - ⇒ the church does not save; but neither is the church unrelated to salvation:
 - ⇒ **Eph. 5, 23**: The church is the saved people; it does not itself save

1. The Human Need

- Why does it need salvation?
 - Rom. 3, 10ff./ **23**: the human conscience confirms this!
 - ⇒ that provides a contact for preaching

- Genesis 1-3: The nature of human beings
 - Of all the competing worldviews, only the biblical doctrines of creation and fall account for the dual nature of humanity: aspirations, ideals, moments of greatness (**1, 26f.**: the greatness – created in the image of God); yet falling short, filled with frustrations and failures (**2, 7**: the weakness – the dust of the

- ground (subject to temptation, sin, sickness, death)
⇒ paradox of dominion and dependence

a. The reality of temptation

- **Gen. 3, 6:** 3 avenues of temptation: appeal to appetite, to the experience of pleasure, to pride
 - Parallel: the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Lk. 4, 1-13)
 - Parallel: **1. Joh. 2, 16**
- ⇒ one way to sum this up is to say that the basic temptation is to deny our status as creatures and to rebel against God
 - WE WANT TO PLAY GOD
 - WE WANT TO BE LIKE GOD
 - WE WANT TO DECIDE FOR OURSELVES WHAT IS GOOD + EVIL
 - occurrences of the language of knowing good and evil in the OT (which is a divine prerogative) show: it means „to determine or to decide good and evil“
- the reality of temptation reveals the **reality of the freedom of the will**

b. The reality of sin

- the second great reality revealed in the Genesis account is that of sin
- Basic to human sinfulness is the failure to acknowledge God as God. In Rom. 1 Paul stresses the failure to honor God and give thanks for his gifts (Rom. 1, 21. 28)
- What is involved in sin according to the biblical descriptions can be summed up as disobedience: **1. Joh. 3, 4**
- as the presence of temptation demonstrates free will, so the practice of sin awakens conscience; another reality: the reality of the conscience
- all human beings have a conscience; what it tells them differs according to their conditioning; Adam and Eve: they ran away and tried to hide from God

c. The reality of punishment

- **Gen. 3, 16:** punishment of the woman
- **Gen. 3, 17-19:** punishment of the man; the condition under which he does the work
- The principal punishment: death
- **James 1, 14f.:** the sequence of the three realities found in Genesis

d. The reality of redemption

- described in **Gen. 3, 15**

2. God's action: The atonement

- Joh. 3, 16; through Christian history various theories of the atonement have been advanced – Scripture never gives us a systematic theory of the atonement; it does not proceed to explain how it works and why
- Instead, it reveals the fact of the atonement and gives us illustrations; it describes it in images in order to make the **reality** of the atonement understandable

a. first image: sacrifice – the language of worship

- Jesus' death = sacrifice
- **Eph. 5, 2**: sacrifice was the common language of religion in the ancient world; the most extensive use of the language of sacrifice in connection with the death of Jesus is found in Heb. 7-10
- In classical Greek the family of words: ‚hilaskomai‘/ ‚hilasmos‘ = to placate/ to appease an angry person or deity
- In NT usage the family of words always has sin as its object
- in contrast to other sacrifices it is not human beings but God who is offering the sacrifice:
 - **1. Joh. 4, 10**; **Rom. 3, 25**
 - ⇒ if you think about it, this is the only way it could be done: by God
- ALSO IN THE OTHER IMAGES OF ATONEMENT IT IS GOD WHO ACTS
 - The divine action for human salvation completely reverses the usual understanding of religion and worship

b. second image: reconciliation – the language of personal relations (*Versöhnung*)

- **2. Cor. 5, 18-20**: The subject of the action, the one doing the reconciling, is God; God does not need to be reconciled to us – we need to be reconciled to him
 - The mediator is Christ
 - we made ourselves enemies; God has gone out to „make us friends again“
- **Rom. 5, 10f.**: God reconciles; WE are reconciled; the mediator is Christ

c. third image: redemption, ransom – the language of the marketplace (*Loskauf; Lösegeld*)

- ransom – Gr. ‚lutron‘ – especially used for buying back those who were captives, whether by armies or pirates; the emphasis is on deliverance
 - the word came to be used for the result more than for the price itself
(*Erlösung*)
- **1. Cor. 6, 19f.**: „...you were bought with a price“ – GOD paid the price

d. fourth image: justification – the language of the lawcourt

- Gr.: dikaiosunē/ dikaiōō – „to pronounce „not guilty““
 - The human being before God is „not guilty“, or better „guilty but pardoned“
 - **Phil. 3, 9**: the righteousness comes FROM God
 - **Rom. 6, 18**: The pardoned person can and must lead a truly new and righteous life.
- ⇒ in this imagery the emphasis again is on what God does

e. fifth image: victory – the language of warfare

- **Col. 2, 15**: the cross is described as the scene where Christ has won a victory

Summary:

- Military victory overcomes the evil powers, justification overcomes law and guilt, redemption overcomes slavery to sin, reconciliation overcomes hostility and chaos, and sacrifice overcomes the need for appeasement
- Whether one thinks in terms of the temple, personal contacts, the marketplace, the law court or the battlefield: GOD IS AT WORK:
- Each image of the atonement emphasizes what God did: he makes the atoning sacrifice, he reconciles, he redeems, he justifies, he wins the victory. In all aspects God is triumphant

Appendix: The preaching of the Gospel:

- The „Great Commission“ comes at the close and climax of all four the Gospels. Preaching the Good News about Jesus is preaching what accomplishes the atonement
- **James 1, 18**: Preaching is a part of God’s plan of salvation. It must be carried out by human beings, but under a divine commission. It is God’s planned way to unite his redemptive action in Christ and human reception of that redemption.

3. The Human Response

a. Faith

- At the heart of the human response is faith, which comes from hearing/ reading the Word: **Rom. 1, 16f.; 10, 17**
- ⇒ in this sense we can say that faith is given by God
- **Gal. 3, 2**: receive faith by believing what you have heard

The elements of faith: Rom. 4, 25. 23f. 22. 19-21

- 25: What Christ did for us
- 23f.: the benefit for us – we are reckoned as righteous

- 22: the basis: faith
- 19-21: definition of faith: trust in the promises of God

aa. Assent – involves the intellect

- Faith involves the acceptance of a truth, an intellectual assent. „Faith comes by hearing“. Information is given, or a proposition is stated. God must first speak. His word is the basis of faith; it is accepted or rejected
 - **Heb. 11, 6:** The only way to know God’s will is to believe what he says
- <In a sense one can never actually **prove** that God exists; there are a lot of evidences for it, yet: rejecting the existence of God and rejecting the bible as the word of God is not completely out of reason>
- assent is not saving faith; in order to define saving faith further we must „narrow the circle“:

bb. trust/conficence – involves the emotions

- Faith involves trust: it requires surrender and commitment. Trust means confidence, taking someone at his/ her word. „I trust that person“ means „I have confidence in what he does; I believe he’ll do what he says“
- **Rom. 4, 21:** see above. Trust is where biblical faith goes beyond mental consent. It is being fully convinced, laying hold of something. There follows an emotional security and persuasion from this commitment.
- Trust in God requires a total loyalty that excludes other loyalties. There is no more trusting the self – justifying, excusing, and attempting to save oneself. One depends on God for all of that. In God alone is there faithfulness. This is an ultimate choice.
- the Muslims have faith in terms of assent and trust, but not saving faith => a third element needs to be introduced:

cc. Obedience – involves the will

- Whom do we obey? That determines the REAL object of our faith
- To believe is to obey: **John 3, 36** et al.
- If God attaches a condition to a promise, faith in the promise includes fulfilling the condition
- for time’s sake we don’t go into the question of how faith and baptism are related, or faith and works, but go to the next part of the human response

b. Repentance

- 3 parts of repentance: godly grief, leading to a change of mind or heart, which leads to a reformation of life

aa. repentance – a result of godly sorrow

- the description in 2. Cor. 7 is also applicable to repentance at conversion
- 2. Cor. 7, 8-10: worldly sorrow and godly sorrow
 - influences to worldly sorrow: disapproval, punishment, failure
 - Godly sorrow is produced by respect for God

bb. repentance – results in an outward change

- **Mt. 3, 8**; Acts 26, 20

cc. repentance – the change of will

- What comes between godly grief and a reformation of life? The inward change that results from godly grief and leads to a reformation of life is what constitutes repentance in the strict sense. Repentance is a change of will in regard to sin. It is the resolve to quit doing evil and start doing right.
- This may be expressed as a change of „mind“ or of „heart“, but perhaps the strength of the idea is best captured by the word „will“ (**Jon. 3, 10**; **Heb. 12, 17**)
- In a comprehensive sense repentance may be used to include the sorrow, the resolve to do better, and the amendment of one's conduct
 - Faith, too, as we saw, often has the broad sense of one's response to God as well as the narrower meaning of the trust in God which is at the heart of that response.

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- Illustration: a person walks in a direction...
 - stops (the conviction of sin; godly sorrow)
 - decides to turn around (repentance); „wrong direction; I want to change“
 - turns around (conversion/ baptism)
 - walks in the opposite direction (reformation of life)

c. baptism

- also an act of faith and of repentance
 - baptism is a result of repentance and an expression of that repentance
 - baptism brings forgiveness of sins – is the appointed time at which God pronounces forgiveness
 - after and as a result of baptism the Spirit is given
 - baptism is a new birth
 - baptism is death and the resurrection of a transformed life
 - baptism places one in the church

3. God's gifts

- God's gifts may be summarized in terms of three great promises of the gospel: forgiveness of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These promises apply salvation to the past, present, and future of the human condition.
 - ⇒ the second and third must be stressed more!

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