

The Substance and Form of our Salvation?

“Jesus saves!” the billboard declares. But how? Is it possible for believers here and now to walk “in salvation,” abiding in Him”? If so, how? Some say personal salvation is by faith alone. Others say it is by faith plus certain additional acts or works on our part, such as keeping the Sabbath, tithing, going to confessional and taking the mass, water baptism by immersion, acts of charity, etc. How can we understand the gift of salvation? How can we sort out the various *doctrines about salvation* from the reality of *salvation itself*?

By Jerry Gentry

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light** of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” [John 8:12](#)

“As long as I am in the world, **I am the light** of the world.” [John 9:5](#)

“Jesus saith unto him, **I am the way**, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” [John 14:6](#)

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” [John 15:4](#)

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” [John 15:7](#)

We are called to put scriptural things together properly, that is, to rightly divide the word of truth. We are called to teach sound doctrine. Truth is first and foremost a Person. The Way is first and foremost a Person. The Light is first and foremost a Person. This – the Truth, the Way, the Light -- is not a formula. This is the God-Man. He declares Himself to be THE way, THE truth, and THE light. All sound doctrine centers upon Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Light. We are taught in scripture to be *centered* upon Him.

He also tells us to do things, such as, keep His Commandments. In scripture He points us to a *way* of life, or rules for living here and how. These *rules* are forms. The Sabbath is a rule, a form of godliness. Tithing is a rule, a form of

godliness. Keeping Feast days are rules. Water baptism by immersion is a rule, a form of godliness. These are all *good forms*, and not to be diminished as to their importance as part of a sound Biblical way of life here on this earth. The Sabbath, tithing, water baptism, keeping feasts, etc. are all *good forms* that show our faith is alive. Such living faith always produces good works. But these *forms are not to be confused with the substance*. All these forms – important as they are in a Biblical Christian walk -- have been called *JUSTIFIABLE nothingness*. In the end, Christ Himself is “*all in all*.” (1Cor. 15:28). He alone is our “hope of glory.” In the end, all righteous forms of salvation must give way to Him, the substance.

This MAN/GOD Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. In Him and Him alone is the SUBSTANCE of our life, our salvation, our atonement, our healing, our deliverance. Our everything comes from Him. When *the Light* shines into our hearts, we come to *saving faith*. Remember, the devils also believe and tremble. They however, do not possess *saving faith*. But it is *saving faith*, the light of “Christ in you, the *hope of glory*.” (Col. 1:27), which is the *substance of our salvation*. The light of Christ abiding in us always leads us into a Biblical way of life, that is, into living according to the rules and principles of scripture.

He came as prophet, as priest, and as king. He was prophesied to come that he might “magnify the law, and *make it honourable*. (Is. 42:21). We too must do good works as defined by the law. He told us: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your *good works*, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16). When we keep the Sabbath day holy *our light shines*, and we testify of Him abiding in us. When we keep Feast days, pay tithes, give alms, submit to Biblical water baptism by immersion, partake in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, choose food to eat according to scripture, then we are *letting our light shine*. We are walking as He walked and glorifying Him. We are advancing His Kingdom here and now. These are all righteous *forms of godliness* witnessing that our *saving faith* is genuine. However, these Godly *forms* are *never* to be confused with the *substance*, who alone is Jesus the Christ Yashua the Messiah Himself!

As lost sinners coming to Christ, the first and foremost part of Him we touch is His priesthood. Someone has to die, and that someone is *us*, because of sin. As sinners, we stand helpless and hopeless before God. The wages of sin is death. When we hear the gospel, we learn that *there is a substitute*. That substitute is the Christ. Hallelujah! The gospel tells us that Jesus *died for our sins*, and that He at the cross became our vicarious substitute. The billboard announcement that “Jesus Saves!” is correct! The big question is, *do we believe this?* Or do we believe something else? At this point, do we accept (believe) Christ’s sacrifice as complete atonement for our sins? Or do we believe we must we add some formula involving *our good works* before we are saved?

Under the Old Covenant, animal sacrifices were personal and specific for the bringer, who brought the animal to the priest who killed the animal by his hand,

and made sacrifice for himself, the bringer and his family. That animal received the punishment that the Israelite transgressor was deserving of.

Under the New Covenant, Christ is first OUR HIGH PRIEST, not after the order of Levi (animal sacrifices), but after the order of Melchizedek (faith):

“The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever **after the order of Melchizedek.**” Psa. 110:4

“As he saith also in another *place*, Thou *art* a priest for ever **after the order of Melchisedec.**” Heb. 5:6

Heb. 5:10 Called of God an high priest **after the order of Melchisedec.**

Heb. 7:11 If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need *was there* that another priest should rise **after the order of Melchisedec**, and not be called **after the order of Aaron**?

Heb. 7:17 For he testifieth, Thou *art* a priest for ever **after the order of Melchisedec.**

Under the Old Covenant, the sinner brought an animal to the Priest, who made sacrifice. Under the New Covenant, *the High Priest became the offerer and the offering!* He is our sacrifice!

“Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover **is sacrificed** for us:” (1Cor. 5:7)
Christ is the Priest. And Christ is also the sacrifice.

He came as THE PROPHET.

Luke 7:28 For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a **greater prophet** than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is **greater** than he.

Matt. 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Both Moses and Elias were there, but the voice from heaven declared: “Hear Ye Him.” Christ is all in all – priest and prophet. We must hear Him.

Further, Christ is king.

“Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the **King of kings**, and Lord of lords;” (1Tim. 6:15).

Heb. 3:6 But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Heb. 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;

Heb. 3:15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

The problem of Israel has always been *unbelief*. It was the problem originally at Sinai. It is the problem today. *The heart is the issue, first and foremost. Always. These in ancient Israel did not believe.* Yet they all kept the Sabbath, contrasted against the one who was found picking up sticks on the Sabbath day, and who was put to death. They all were baptized by water. “And were all **baptized** unto **Moses** in the cloud and in the sea;” (1Cor. 10:2). The problem was *unbelief*, whereby they were condemned. Form always follows substance. Wickedness and death follows unbelief. Abundant life follows saving faith. Always.

The substance (saving faith) never becomes the form (way of life), and the form (way of living) never becomes the substance (saving faith). He that has ears to hear let him hear. Do we have ears to hear, or are we dull of hearing?

The apostle Paul develops the doctrine of justification in Romans. He declares: “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be **justified** in his sight.” (Rom. 3:20). He declares, “Therefore being **justified** by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:” (Rom. 5:1). “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also **justified**: and whom he **justified**, them he also glorified.” (Rom. 8:30). Paul speaks of justification in past tense, as though it is already completed, a done deal, since Christ is “the **Lamb slain from** the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8). The substance of our salvation was declared from long ago. The reality came at the cross. The application comes when the sinner receives *saving faith*. The witness to the world comes when the believer obeys various forms of godliness, such as Sabbath keeping, Feast keeping, tithe paying, alms giving, proper water baptism, holy communion, etc.

The word faith appears 39 times in Romans. Various forms of the word “justify” appear 17 times. The word “sabbath” never appears. “Feast days” never appear. The word “tithe” never appears. The word “water” never appears. The various forms of the word “baptize” appear only 3 times, as in:

Rom. 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were **baptized** into Jesus Christ were **baptized** into his death?

Rom. 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by **baptism** into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also

should walk in newness of life. In scripture, water baptism is taught as a symbolic burial of the old man, and pictures the new man rising to walk in newness of life.

How can Paul develop completely the doctrine of justification without ever mentioning Sabbath keeping, or tithing or water baptism? Because, as he later declares to the Ephesians:

“For **by grace** are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God.” ([Eph. 2:8](#))

Even so it was with the believers in the book of Acts, who had never heard of water baptism, until later, after they had come to saving faith, already having received the Holy Spirit:

“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have **received** the **Holy Ghost** as well as we?” ([Acts 10:47](#))

Naturally, water baptism by immersion followed, once they had learned of it. But regeneration (saving faith) by the Holy Ghost had already taken place.

If we hear these things and do not receive them, then do we really know HIM? If we do not have ears to hear, or eyes to see, we become blind leaders of the blind. We are still stumbling in darkness. To such teachers, Jesus commanded: “Let them alone: they be **blind leaders** of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” ([Matt. 15:14](#)). No man and no act of obedience can open our eyes and “unblind” us. God alone, through the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates. He alone opens our eyes to truth and sound doctrine. Doctrinal issues like this we either see or we don’t. And, “**without faith** *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” ([Heb. 11:6](#)). *Saving faith alone saves. Good works* always follow.

As our high priest, Christ is a Great Shepherd:

[Ezek. 34:12](#) As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep *that are* scattered; so will I seek out **my sheep**, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

Christ earned the right to be the firstborn among many brethren in his humiliation. He learned obedience by the things he suffered. Therefore every knee shall bow before this man, rightfully so, not because of His Godhead only, but because of the humiliation he experienced in his manhood. He had to do these things. Therefore he did them, and by doing so, he became “all in all.” In doing so, he is buying back everything that was lost, the whole creation. He even bought back the non elect, in order that he might judge them in their sins. He even bought Satan and all his host. Under the New Covenant, he is taking on man in a

completely different way than did Yahweh under the Old Covenant. It is through him alone, under the New Covenant, that we find mercy.

“But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have **mercy**, and not **sacrifice**: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Matt. 9:13).

“For he shall have judgment without **mercy**, that hath shewed no **mercy**; and **mercy rejoiceth** against judgment.” (James 2:13).

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (Matt. 7:2).

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Matt. 7:3).

“Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye?” (Matt. 7:4).

“Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” (Matt. 7:5).

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:: (Matt. 7:28).

“For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Matt. 7:29).

Keeping the law (forms of godliness) is good, yet antinomianism reigns in the modern church world. They claim the law is done away. However, without the law, we do not know sin. It is the law that defines sin.

“Godliness is **profitable** unto all **things**, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” (1Tim. 4:8).

Obedience to a Biblical *way of life* filled with Godly forms is profitable. In the end all such forms show forth our *saving faith*, that we are abiding in Him, who alone is the *substance of our salvation*.

Scripture warns us about teachers who have “a form of godliness,” but deny the power or substance:

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” (2Tim. 3:5).

These teachers are:

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2Tim. 3:7)

Remember that truth is first and fost a *person*. Such teachers never come to “truth” because such teachers always elevate *forms of godliness* above the *substance of godliness*. The substance of my salvation is my *saving faith* in the One who saves, Jesus Christ. The form of my godliness is defined by my way of living or obedience after I am saved.

Jesus is prophet, priest and king, He trumps it all. He becomes the ULTIMATE, the last revelation of God to man. He is the SUBSTANCE of our salvation, for all those who have come to the end of themselves, and have received *saving faith*.

These alone understand, as the apostle Paul understood, *saving faith*:

“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the **faith of Christ**, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” (Phil. 3:9).

Substance always produces form. Form always follows substance. *Form never becomes the substance*. Christ alone is our atonement, our substance, accessed by *saving faith* alone, and later manifested to the world by *good works* defined by scripture that always follow.

Saving faith alone is the Substance of our Salvation. Godly forms always follow, hallelujah!