

AND FINALLY TO OUR SALVATION

One of the principal claims made by Christians against the Masonic Order is the claim that we believe in salvation by works rather than by grace. Many might argue as does Dr. James Tresner that Masonry is not a religion and therefore teaches no method of salvation. While Dr. Tresner shows that he really does not understand the difference between the religions of the West and the dominant American protestants, it is important to say that while Masonry is not a religion, it is a religious brotherhood and does inculcate a way of life that is unique and complete as a method to eventually go to the Masonic Heaven, called the Grand Lodge Above. Similarly, Christianity is both a religion and a way of life. It is joined by Judaism and Islam which likewise are both religions and ways of living. So while we cannot say that Masonry is a religion, we can say with assurance that Freemasonry offers an unique and distinct method of spiritual enlightenment that will result in the eventual unification of the Mason with those who have gone before him.

In this paper, I intend to look briefly at the concept of salvation as taught by the Jews, the ancient Christians, the Protestants, and the Freemasons.

THE JEWISH DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Judaism is an orthopractic religion. In Judaism, there are both dogmas and doctrines which help to guide the religion, but those dogmas and doctrines are all centered on the proper actions one must take to remain at peace with G-d. In contrast, Christianity is a orthodoxic religion and is primarily concerned with proper beliefs and does not care much about how one actually acts.

The Hebrew word for save is "yasha" and it means to be open, wide or free, that is by implication to be safe. From the feminine past participle we get the concept of salvation which means deliverance, health, help (-ing), **salvation**, save, saving (health), welfare.

The first mention of salvation in Scripture is found in Genesis 49:18 where Ya'akov describes his son Dan as the judge of his people. The Hebrew word for judge is dayan which is related to the word dan. Ya'akov says that this judgment of Dan is like a serpent that bites a horse causing him to throw the rider off and to limit his ability to get ahead in life.

The next mention of salvation is in Exodus in reference to the saving miracle that G-d performed through Moses when he split the Reed Sea. Then it talks about it again in the Song of Merriam when she celebrates G-d's victory over Pharoah at the Reed Sea.

In Deuteronomy, YHVH is called the Rock of Salvation again meaning that YHVH saves his people from real problems that confront them daily. Hannah rejoices in YHVH for having made her able to bear Samuel and in that way saving her reputation as a holy woman.

Throughout the Book of Psalms, salvation is mentioned and in no place does it speak of salvation as some future event involving ones future reward. In all cases, salvation is an immediate prayed for request and generally an immediate act received.

In the Prophets, we find them extolling YHVH as a sure source that we can trust to defend us in our cause and save us from our immediate woes. Isaiah 12:12 puts it best when he says: "Behold, The Elohim is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid for Yah YHVH is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation." We trust in YHVH to protect us and defend us and in that way we truly are the inheritance of Ya'akov. See Deuteronomy 32:9.

So Judaism believes in salvation, but it is a salvation that is immediate and near at hand, it is personal to the one being saved, and it involves the direct intervention of G-d in history to change the events so as to deliver the person or persons from perceived troubles. In every case, the people, by their faithfulness are called to trust in the Lord, to keep his commandments, and to live in accordance with his laws. Thus salvation is a doctrine of works and the works of Torah are required to receive it. As Judaism has no formal teaching on the afterlife, salvation has nothing to do with the afterlife. However, salvation has everything to do with character.

Judaism believes that one must try to perfect themselves by living a flawless life. While Judaism does not adopt Yeshua's belief that what we think actually is an action, they do believe that if we constantly think things which are contrary to that flawless life we seek, we will fail and we will find our life on earth shortened as a result. Success in Judaism is real and personal, material and spiritual, and is reflected by our willingness to help each other succeed. Salvation is therefore both an act of the Elohim YHVH and of the People of Israel who are called to keep the Way of Life given to them by that Elohim. The idea of a perfected ashlar is not contrary to Jewish concepts of salvation.

THE CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion talks about salvation in Christianity. It says:

Christians through the centuries have generally agreed on the three main features of salvation. First, while the initial fruits of salvation may be experienced in the present life, its full realization is delayed until the next. Only in heaven, in the immediate presence of G-d, will people's deepest desires for peace, justice, and fulfillment be completely satisfied. Second, there are numerous obstacles in the present life that make attaining heaven difficult, and of themselves people are incapable of salvation. It is only by the grace of G-d that these obstacles are overcome and people are made worthy of G-d. And third, Jesus Christ is absolutely decisive for salvation, for it is principally through Christ's work on the Cross that G-d has made available the grace required to resolve the problems and contradictions of human existence.

The Protestants differ from the Catholics, Orthodox, and Oriental Christians who compose the vast majority and the tradition of the ancient church on this vital subject. The ancient churches teach salvation means to live G-d's own life, to know and love G-d directly as G-d knows and loves G-d. But people are not G-d and so cannot of themselves achieve the life appropriate to G-d. In the ancient churches, grace raises one above one's natural powers, making it possible to perform actions pleasing to G-d and readying its possessor for entry into the divine inheritance in the next life. For the Greek

fathers, G-d became human so that people could become G-d. St. Anselm said: "We have been called to the transcendent destiny of life in heaven with G-d. To attain this good, people must perform actions perfective of human nature. By these actions, people concomitantly offer that honor that is owing to the Creator. But, by sin, people have defected from the path that leads to G-d and, moreover, have failed to give to G-d the honor owing to G-d." Because anything that we do, was already due G-d, we can never catch up on what needs to be done to restore the honor of G-d. Jesus' death accomplished that end.

The idea therefore of a rough ashlar becoming through our work a perfect ashlar is inconsistent ultimately with the idea that the ashlar can never accomplish its work without the intervention of a divine workman who is willing to make of us his master work. We cannot do that of ourselves and so ultimately our work, while necessary is not possible without Jesus and as Jesus has no place in the Masonic story, we are a heretical group.

THE PROTESTANT VIEW OF SALVATION

Protestantism begins this analysis with the idea that the sin of Adam permanently destroyed the character of man. In some way, his act became generic. All of us are guilty of seeking for the tree of good and evil and we all are willing to rebel against G-d to get it. That natural desire to sin is inherent in the human species. Thus, although we are all called to be like G-d and all of us called to perfect our character, it is not possible to accomplish that task. We need someone or something else to intervene to allow us to begin the path. While in Catholicism we can do good acts and can remain in contact with G-d without being part of the body of Christ, in Protestantism no good work done outside of the body of Christ is good. It is all evil because it was done without Christ.

In Matthew 10:22 we find these words: "And you shall be hated by all men for my name's sake, but he that endures to the end shall be saved." This statement teaches a doctrine of works because it implies that if you endure in doing what Jesus commands you will be saved. Therefore, some action of yours causes salvation. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist prophesies in Luke 1:71 that we shall be saved from all our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us. So in this passage we again see the idea that G-d is an active G-d who saves us from our current woes and that salvation has nothing to do with after life events. In Luke 7:50, Jesus comments to the woman with the alabaster jar of nard that she will be saved by her faith in Jesus power to forgive sins. Thus again we see that it is the faith of the person in Jesus, not grace, that saves.

However, it is claimed that Paul taught something else. Let us see what he taught. Rom. 5:9 says: "How much more then, since we are justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath." What is Paul talking about? Paul believed that the Day of Lord, the time when G-d would show forth His Wrath was imminent and that people who were not believers in Jesus were to be destroyed during this Day of Lord. He believes that if we are justified by faith in the saving power of Jesus' blood, then on that day we would not be destroyed. So, Paul's idea of salvation is like the Jewish idea: he presumes that G-d will save us from a real event if we believe in the point of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The obvious problem is that he believed that event would happen almost immediately, that he would be alive when it happened, and that every other thing was of no concern. He was wrong. We have waited 2,000 years and the event has not occurred. So if salvation is solely from that event, why is it important

for those not alive during that event. Arguably, if all that Jesus' sacrifice was worth, was salvation on the day of wrath, most people did not need to be saved and it would accomplish nothing for them.

A review then of the Pauline and thence the Protestant view of salvation is that character and good living has nothing to do with salvation. Salvation is a free gift given to those on the day of Wrath.

The Masonic View of Salvation

A man who becomes a Mason is already a good man. He already understands that he has duties to his G-d, his country, his neighbor, his family and his self. How did he get that character already. We must see the true candidate as the person who is the stone out of the quarry with all the necessary characteristics of the stone that the builders had rejected. It is the stone that will become the cornerstone. The character of the cornerstone is its lack of major flaws. Major flaws would cause the stone under pressure to crumble and the entire edifice, that house not made with hands, to crumble with it. A sculptor chooses the stone he will carve with care. He sees where the faults are at and decides whether those faults can be cured or at least improved. So, the candidate is not perfect, but he has faults which can be improved and others removed.

How are we going to improve this candidate? We must chip away the imperfections and superfluities which make his character subject to destruction during times of stress. We do that by letting him work with others who likewise are on a path toward perfection. They like he sit in the sculptor's studio and the Sculptor by application of pressure, challenge, heat, cold, and chisel whittles away the imperfections so that the stone becomes better every day. Events in this person's life are changed by prayer, by reflection on how he is moving with the brotherhood and his family, and finally by accepting the challenges sent to him by the Master Sculptor Himself.

Salvation therefore is becoming a perfect ashlar. Salvation requires that the Sculptor intervene in our lives constantly to save us from bad decisions and help us to choose wisely the path we are walking on. At any moment, the pressure, the choice of decisions, the way we act, may cause the stone, our character, to crumble and the stone will be lost. Until the end, we are not saved. But the Sculptor will find some of us perfect for that building not made with hands. A Mason is saved by letting the Sculptor present us with choices and challenges and choosing rightly along the way. We neither save ourselves, nor become impotent, uninvolved pawns of some omnipotent deity. Our Sculptor is part of our lives and we become intimate with Him. As a result, the building rises. When we see that our stone was chosen and put into the building, then we know that finally we have received our salvation.

Right Worshipful Barry Albin, 9/10/15