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ARTICLE VI.

IDEA OF SALVATION, AS PRESENTED IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT.

BY THE REV. FRANK CHURCHILL WOODS.

THAT there is something to be saved from, is the testimony of each soul. Every man is conscious, that many of his deeds are misdeeds; that he has failed in diverse respects to conform with the law of his normal being; that his present condition is not the highest to which he may attain, nor to which he might even have already attained. Every man has felt within him an energy or impulse constraining to do that which is contrary to his own welfare, as also the welfare of others; a passion to a performance against which judgment and conscience protest, and to which he consents in some fashion he knows not how. The consent and ill conduct are explained by many in the words of Dante,

"The stormy blast of hell,
With restless fury, drives the spirits on."

Others explain in the language of Paul, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Others dismiss the strange problem as too subtle for solution. However careful the sowing, whatever the quality of the seed, tares appear in the field. The question presses, Whence come these? All alike are aware that they are in need of salvation. As the trump of God at last shall awake the dead, so this clarion note at present arouses the spiritually dead.

At the beginning of the mission of Jesus of Nazareth,

this note was heard. Ere he had appeared at Bethlehem the nature of his spirit and of his mission was announced. The angel of the Lord informed Joseph concerning the supernatural conception of the child, and said, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." In these words there is the ground of appeal that the Christ was to make to men, a prophecy of his accomplishment, and a comprehensive statement of the doctrine of salvation. As a guide and a means to the understanding of this doctrine in the New Testament, the prophecy of the angel should be given prominent place in mind. In the present discussion, attention will be given: (1) to what salvation is; (2) to the time of its realization; (3) to its relation to Christianity.

WHAT IS SALVATION?

The words already quoted from the angel are succinct reply: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus [i.e. Saviour], for he shall save his people from their sins." Throughout the rest of the New Testament, the changes are rung upon this brief statement. The purpose of salvation is not that men may find entrance into heaven. There is an ancient fiction, latent in the minds of not a few, that heaven is like a great and gorgeous house, in which there is naught but joy, and that the end of the gospel is in some fashion to enable man to gain entrance to the blessed abode. Some may have to struggle to get in, may have to squeeze their way through the door; but, so they at length are found inside, this is all to be desired. Nowhere does the New Testament lend sanction to so foolish a fancy. Salvation is not for heaven, but from sin. If heaven be thought of as a state of character, and not as a place of reward, salvation may be said to be for heaven. Salvation is to rid man of his meanness and wickedness; is to keep him from doing what is bad, to change the principle by which he is actuated and dominated; is to transform his manhood, that

through and through he may be worthy to be called a son of God. Heaven is a fact, apart from the question of salvation. Every man shall have his own place hereafter. Judas went to his own place; each of the eleven went to his place. In the Father's house are many mansions. What the place of any individual may be, is dependent of course upon his salvation. But the fact is patent, that salvation is primarily not for heaven, but from sin. So, also, salvation is not primarily from hell, in the sense that hell is punishment of sin or a place of punishment. If hell be thought of as wickedness within man, as Milton's devil says, "Myself am hell," salvation is rescue from such condition. But the truth to be emphasized is, that salvation essentially does not refer to the objective, but to the subjective; not to any bane or boon that may come to man or upon man, but to man himself, in his act, principle, and state. The physician who strives to save the insane patient gives exclusive attention to the cure of the malady. He would prevent the madman's deed, be rid of the subtle principle of mental derangement, make normal once more the disordered brain. He does not think of saving the man to be a politician, minister of the gospel, or aught else; but of saving him from insanity. Sin in its enormity and abnormality is the fact with which salvation has to do.

While this is true, deliverance implies corresponding benefaction. There can be no salvation from anything, unless there be salvation to something. If a man is saved from lying, he is established in a state of truthfulness. Deliverance from illness implies possession of health. Rescue from sin likewise implies attainment unto holiness. Conquest of sin was the primary purpose of Jesus; yet the idea of salvation necessarily hurries us into contemplation of its benefaction.

In a certain sense, salvation must pertain also to that

which is without. The inmost and the outmost cannot be long separated. As Emerson says, "The inmost in due time becomes the outmost, and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the last judgment." At length there must be exact correlation between the subjective and objective, between the spirit and its conditions. The resurrection body and the last element of the future environment must bear the impress of the spirit's rescue. To such uniformity, there is constant tendency in the present life. If a man be saved from something within, he must also be saved from something without. So salvation from death is spoken of; a death which seems to imply much more than the subjective. "Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation, not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world works out death" (2 Cor. vii. 10); "He who turns a sinner from the error of his way, will save a soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins" (James v. 20).

The necessity of this objective bearing of salvation is explained by the fact, that what a man is, determines the divine attitude toward him. And what is the attitude of God, save an eternal environment? The attitude of man toward man constitutes the larger part of earthly environment. According as one is loved or hated in a community, is his outward condition agreeable or disagreeable. And where divine will is the supreme fact, divine favor the exclusive issue, divine fellowship the superlative boon, the outmost in environment must be determined by the inmost in spirit. Self will pervade circumstance. Circumstance will be the divine expression. The attitude of God is heaven or hell. So salvation, in last analysis, must touch the most remote element of the objective. In pursuance of this fact, Paul presents the outward bearing of salvation: "We shall be saved from wrath" (Rom. v. 9); "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to gain salvation

through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. v. 9); "He that endures to the end, this one shall be saved" (Matt. x. 22). In these passages, thought is wrested from personal merit or demerit, to corresponding outward conditions.

As salvation has objective bearing on the future, so also does it apply to the past. A transformed character may command the gracious attitude of God so far as the future alone is concerned; but such character cannot erase the records of former sin, nor divest itself of the influence of such records. As the inmost becomes the outmost, so also the outmost often determines the inmost. Rescue from former divine wrath is no less necessary than rescue from future divine wrath. Release from sinning is contingent upon release from the pressure of guilt. There is no elasticity while conscience burdens the spirit with accusations of former transgression. The psalmist says, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart"; but there is no enlargement while the contraction of guilt is experienced. Weight of condemnation presses to abandonment to still further wrong. The past must be cleared, before the present and future can be righted. Sin must be covered, before it can be separated. Thus salvation implies atonement. The scriptural meaning of the word "atonement" is here maintained, viz., *covering of sin*. Salvation is the separation of sin. In order of experience, salvation is the middle ground between atonement and reward. But it logically extends into both realms.

As to the extent of salvation, man cannot trace its operation to the limit. This deliverance is as extensive as the nature and operation of sin. Who is possessed of metaphysical power, such as to discern the full content of the term "sin"? In the physical realm, there is a subtle energy that expresses itself now as electricity, again as light, again as heat; but who knows the inmost nature of this

energy, or can explain its transformation? So while sin is a fact with which we are familiar, who can discern its hidden meaning, or follow it in all its ways? How inscrutable is its operation in the will! Upon what grounds did it necessarily cause death? What an enigma is the fall! And as sin cannot be found out to perfection, salvation cannot be comprehended. Salvation is everywhere and in every respect the attendant and the foe of sin. Could we understand fully all that is implied by sin, we could set bounds to salvation. The two are coterminous.

THE TIME SALVATION IS REALIZED.

A strange and perplexing fact is met with in this part of the discussion. Here is the question mooted. Salvation is spoken of in the New Testament, in tenses past, present, and future. One is impelled then to careful consideration, in order to determine at what time salvation is consummated. In a discussion of the passages in which the word *σώζω* and related terms are found, there is no need that attention be given to those that pertain to physical healing. Of course, when any one was cured of disease, through the miraculous power of Jesus, such an one was straightway made whole. The words *σώζω*, *σωτηρία*, *σωτήριον* may be expected in these instances to describe a completed act. But the question that here prevails is, What is the significance of these words when employed to designate rescue from moral and spiritual infirmity? The time of physical healing was immediate; but what about the time of spiritual healing?

Prevailing passages on this subject refer to salvation as a present and future fact. Passages that speak of salvation in the present will first be cited. Of course but few can be given. In rendering these, care is taken to give to each the value of the present tense of the Greek. This is done, not only because the exact use of the Greek language

so requires, but also because one is not warranted in departing from such use, unless conditions make the departure absolutely necessary. Such departure implies an inexact and careless use of the language on the part of the writers of the New Testament. Reverence for writings held so dear, should make this resort the very last to be considered. The King James version is utterly indifferent to the value of these present tenses. The Revised version is more careful, but in several instances gives to the present the value of the aorist. Here are some of the passages:—

“The Lord added together daily those who were being saved” (Acts ii. 47).

“The word of the cross is to those who are perishing, foolishness; but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Cor. i. 18).

“We are to God a sweet savor of Christ, in those who are being saved, and in those who are perishing” (2 Cor. ii. 15).

Another verse is peculiar; and suggests that the apostle Paul was either very careful or very careless in his use of tenses. The passage is, 1 Cor. xv. 2: “Through which [i.e. the gospel] also ye are being saved, if you are holding fast with what word I preached to you, unless ye believed in vain.” These passages are sufficient to show the use of the present, in the unfolding of this doctrine.

Still more numerous are statements that salvation is a fact of the future:—

“And this, knowing the season, that it is high time already for you to be awaked out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom. xiii. 11).

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is working in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure” (Phil. ii. 12, 13).

“But let us, being of the day, be sober, putting on a breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, hope of salvation” (1 Thess. v. 8).

“Who by the power of God are guarded through faith, unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. i. 5).

“He that endures to the end, this one shall be saved” (Matt. x. 22).

“Much more, therefore, being justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath through him. For if, being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom. v. 9, 10).

“The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim. iv. 18).

From these passages, the idea of the New Testament, concerning salvation, unquestionably appears to be, that it is a process now in operation, to be completed in future. But here the question demands answer, Is it necessary to translate the present participles with the force of the Greek present? i.e. as a state or action now existing? May they not be rendered as aorists, i.e. as that which is absolutely past, and which corresponds with the English preterite? This would cause the passages already rendered, “being saved,” to read, “saved.” Salvation would thus be presented as a work already effected in behalf of the believer, rather than as a process now in operation. In support of this aoristic use of the present, the statement has been made, that “the passive participle of the present tense in Greek is often, if not generally, used to express a complete action.”¹

As illustrating this fact, such passages are cited as, “His father and mother were wondering at the things spoken [not speaking] concerning him” (Luke ii. 33). Also, “He saw the heavens opened,” not opening (Matt. i. 10).

¹T. W. Chambers, D.D., *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis*, June, 1886.

Whether the present participle is so employed in the New Testament, must be decided after inquiry into all mooted passages. That such is not the "general" use of the participle in the later Scriptures, is a fact that can hardly be questioned. One should deliberate carefully ere he recognize such use anywhere in the New Testament. In confirmation of this opinion, a few reasons may be briefly given:—

1. To use the present as an aorist is radical departure from the discriminating employment of the verb in classical Greek.

2. If it be held that the writers of the New Testament used the verb in so lax and indiscriminating fashion, what right have we to assert that any verb is to be assigned its critical and unique force? So when we find flashes of beauty or strokes of power in many portions of the later Scriptures, given in the peculiar use of the verb, making one wonder at the subtlety and grandeur of Divine thought, we must shut our eyes to such instruction, and conclude these writers used the verb so loosely that this may be the slip of human ignorance, rather than the precision of divine wisdom.

3. Grammarians admitted to be most trustworthy, such as Green and Winer, insist upon ascribing to the use of every verb its exact force. Winer pertinently remarks, "No one of these tenses strictly and properly taken can stand for another, as commentators would often have us believe. But where such an interchange appears to take place, either it is merely apparent, and a sufficient reason (especially a rhetorical one) can be discovered why this and no other tense has been used, or it is to be set down to the account of a certain inaccuracy peculiar to the language of the people, which did not conceive and express relations of time with entire precision."¹

¹ Winer, *Grammar*, 264.

4. Passages in which, it is insisted, the present participle is used as aorist, may probably in every case be interpreted according to the strict uses of the present. Take, for example, the passages already cited in opposition: "His father and mother were wondering at the things spoken concerning him." May not this be given the simple, unqualified force of the present, "the things speaking concerning him"? Those things were then coming from the lips of Simeon and Anna; and coming with an entirely new meaning. They were finding present and significant utterance. Also, in the passage "He saw the heavens opened," the present is commonly employed in vivid narration of past events. An illustration of this is, "In those days, cometh John." May not the statement of "the opened heavens" be, so interpreted, a mere historical present?

5. If the writers of the New Testament wished to speak of salvation as an accomplished fact, why did they not employ language about which there could be no doubt? They regularly used the aorist to express this thought. Why should they depart in this instance, and use the present, that might be susceptible of diverse interpretations?

6. If it be granted, that the present participle of the passive voice is sometimes used to express complete action, unquestionably such use is the decided exception. Since this is the exception, why should we take the exceptional use of the present, and upon this as a foundation build one of the most important of doctrines, viz., that of "salvation"?

This discussion of grammar has been extended because of its vital bearing upon the subject. Without this there could be no comprehensive consideration. In the light of this and other facts, salvation, as presented in the New Testament, is manifestly to be understood as a process, now in operation, to be completed at some future time. Or, it

is a subject considered from three points of view; viz., those of its inception, continuation, and completion. In apparent contrast with other teaching on the subject, the apostle Paul wrote five verses that demand attention. These speak of salvation in past tenses. They are the following: "By hope we were being saved" (Rom. viii. 24); "By grace ye have been saved" (Eph. ii. 5); "By grace ye have been saved through faith" (Eph. ii. 8); "God, who saved us, and called us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. i. 8, 9); "According to his mercy he saved us" (Tit. iii. 5). Striking as these passages are, shall they be taken in refutation of Paul's constant teaching elsewhere? Since these are so few in number, are they not rather to give precedence to other and more numerous statements from the same pen, and be understood to refer to the inception of the process of salvation? This appears to be the only candid interpretation. Those addressed are such as have committed their souls to Christ for constant and continuous cleansing. As to the reality of their act, and sincerity of their faith, the apostle has no question.

In these passages, also, Paul may regard the initial act of salvation in the light of its consummation. The strong faith, earnest effort, of these Christians, together with divine promises, may have hurried his thought from the beginning of the operation to its close. Often in common speech is a process termed complete, when indeed it is only at its beginning. The drowning man is spoken of as saved, when he has just been taken into the life-boat. The untutored boy is spoken of as rescued from ignorance, when he has only now been placed in the school. So Paul addressed as "saved" those who were in the process of salvation, and to whom he further declares, "Ye shall be saved by the life of Christ." In confirmation of this view of salvation is the teaching of the Old Testament on the subject. Israel was regarded both as a nation already

saved and as a nation to be saved. Throughout the word of God, the words of the angel to Joseph are found to be true in their literal significance. Salvation is something to be wrought in and for those who have already become the people of God.

In the light of the foregoing, it may be asked, Should a Christian speak of himself as "saved"? This is warranted, if he bear in mind the meaning of the word employed. Did not Paul so speak of himself and Timothy; also of other Christians? Why may not the Christian of to-day apply the same language to himself and others? Only let him be sure of this, that he has with Paul, determination to be rid of sin; coöperation with his Lord, to combat evil in every form; passion dominant above every other, to work out his own salvation. Unless there be present striving against sin, it is in vain that one speaks of himself as "saved." There is a sort of salvation, conspicuous in much religious fancy, that is not contemplated in the New Testament. It is a salvation that pertains to the past and future, but not to the present. A salvation possessed as one owns a ticket for an entertainment; the ticket has been obtained, and guarantees admission when the time of the entertainment shall have come. Nothing is to be looked after between the time of purchase and that of attendance. This idea may also be likened to the political act of registration. The name has been duly inscribed on the books of the ward. When the time of balloting shall have come, the man may appear at the polls as a voter. Between registration and voting there is nothing to cause concern. This idea of salvation impels one to sing, in blissful abandon, concerning his faith in its entirety, "I left it all with Jesus long ago." Profession of religion has been made; the church joined; the matter ended. Such salvation includes no present and constant denial of self; feels the pressure of no cross, borne for the rescue of others; is characterized

by no rigorous purpose, that each step be taken in the footprints of the Lord Jesus. Whether salvation be a fact of the past and future, is dependent on its being an intense fact in the present. No man is saved from the past and for the future who is not being saved in the present. Faith that operates forensically, operates also ethically. The ground of present judgment is faith; that of the last judgment, is works, or faith that extends from the inmost to the outmost—"Ye did it," "Ye did it not." Faith severed from strife is not recognized in the New Testament. Mark the presentation of the fact in the sixth chapter of Romans. If the atonement removes guilt, it excites revulsion to sin. If salvation has place in grateful memory and complacent anticipation, it has place also in present restless purpose. If it gives release from Nemesis, and promise of reward, it will give impulse to immediate renovation. If aught that Christ did is appropriated for us, the principle of the work will be cultivated in us. If expiation and imputation be true for any man, their reality will be attested in present passion. If one say then, "I am saved," let the stress of the claim be placed, not on what has been or will be done, but on what he and his Lord are now doing in his character. The test of faith is vitality.

The discussion also throws light on the duty of the Christian ministry. They are preachers of salvation. This means truth necessary to the separation of self from sin; all that serves the removal of wrong, and participation of the life of Christ. To induce a man to come to Christ, is to bestir him merely to enter on the process of salvation. He yet needs truth upon truth, even the deep things of God, into which the Spirit searcheth, to enable him to be rid of hidden, tortuous, and persistent wrong.

THE RELATION OF SALVATION TO CHRISTIANITY.

As salvation is the end Christ came to effect, Christianity is the means to this end. Christianity answers the

question of Job, "How should man be just with God?" And again that of Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" From of old, men had known the necessity of deliverance from evil. This fact is emphasized by Hebrew prophets, and in writings of other peoples. But the question that had perplexed writers of every age was, in what manner to effect the end so clear to the discerning mind. The simple fellow could say to the astronomer, If you wish to see what the rings of Saturn are like, take a journey thither. How easy to say to the man on a sinking vessel, There is the shore, hasten yonder. The aspiring politician might be told, Be elected to the Senate of the United States, then your course will be clear. But all of these—the astronomer, voyager, politician—would straightway reply, The thing to be done is clear enough; but what concerns me is, the method of its accomplishment. So was the state of mind of men before the coming of Jesus. They knew to large extent the thing of which they were in want; but the want was much deeper than they could meet. Christianity embraces the atonement, the work of the Spirit, and every means that serves to effect salvation.

The question, then, that Christianity answers, is "how," rather than "what." Many adverse critics of the religion, not perceiving this fact, have made derogatory statements that are wide of the mark. They have said, that much of the teaching of Jesus was not original with him. His golden rule had been earlier given by Hillel, Aristotle, Isocrates, and even Confucius. His model prayer is said to be all found in the Talmud, or in liturgies now used in synagogues. What if all this be true? Quite natural that much truth, innate in man, should have come to light before the advent of Jesus. But the truth that had not come to light, and that he came to declare, was, *How* man may

be enabled to observe the golden rule, and enter into right relationship with God.

The statement is sometimes heard, "My creed¹ is the Sermon on the Mount." A lofty creed indeed! But it lacks the essential element of a Christian creed, viz., *how to observe* the sermon on the mount. Dr. George P. Fisher says, "Christianity is the means of salvation. To hold up the idea of the absolute religion in the midst of a world under the sway of ungodliness and selfishness, can only be compared to the conduct of one who, when the plague is raging, runs about with an excellent definition of health."¹ Before the sermon on the mount was given, men knew a loftier ethical code than they put into practice. Rousseau says, "When Plato paints his ideal man, he paints, feature after feature, Jesus Christ: the resemblance is so striking that all the fathers have felt it, and it is not possible for any one to mistake it." Perhaps Rousseau is correct. Plato's fancy may have conceived such an ideal. But only the thought of God, and the gift of God, has made possible attainment to that ideal. Here is the essence of Christianity, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."

It was not the statement of any ideal on the part of Jesus that amazed and bewildered his disciples. They were already possessed of conceptions that enabled them readily to grasp his more complete presentation. They not only discerned the worth of ideals he presented in words, but especially that he gave in himself. In him they perceived the matchless symmetry, that has won the reverence of the world. The explanation of this symmetry was even detected: "Thou art the Christ," says Peter, "the Son of the living God." As the recipient of this divine instruction, the apostle is straightway pronounced "Blessed." But other divine instruction they did not, would not, and

¹ Supernatural Origin of Christianity, p. 453.

(before the resurrection) apparently could not, receive. This was concerning the method of attaining to the ideal. This is the acme of all instruction, even of that which is divine. This is the most difficult truth for the unspiritual mind to grasp.

“From that time began Jesus Christ to show to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised up. And Peter taking him aside began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be to thee. But he turned and said to Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumbling-block to me: for thou art not thinking the things of God, but those of men.”

Jesus indeed dispelled the mists from the mountain-top of truth; but his chief work was to open a way thither.