

GOD IN ACTION



ONE ARMY: We see a God-raised, Spirit-filled Army for the 21st century - convinced of our calling, moving forward together

We will...

- deepen our spiritual life
- unite in prayer
- identify and develop leaders
- increase self-support and self-denial

ONE MISSION: Into the world of the hurting, broken, lonely, dispossessed and lost, reaching them in love by all means

We will...

- emphasise our integrated ministry
- reach and involve youth and children
- stand for and serve the marginalised
- encourage innovation in mission

ONE MESSAGE: With the transforming message of Jesus, bringing freedom, hope and life

We will...

- communicate Christ unashamedly
- reaffirm our belief in transformation
- evangelise and disciple effectively
- provide quality teaching resources

**God in Action Bible Study Manuel produced by Captain Michael Ramsay at the Swift Current Corps of The Salvation Army, September 2012.*

Doctrines of The Salvation Army

1. We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God; and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.
2. We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.
3. We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead - the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost - undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.
4. We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.
5. We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness; and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.
6. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has, by His suffering and death, made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.
7. We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit are necessary to salvation.
8. We believe that we are justified by grace, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.
9. We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.
10. We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
11. We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgment at the end of the world; in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked.

In this Bible Study we will be looking at different ways in which God is active in our world today. We will look at various scriptures and ask ourselves, ‘what are we going to do about it’?

Lesson 9: James 1-2; 2 Peter 3, Jude

We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

Background and context:The Apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians was written circa 49-57CE to a church or a number of churches in a region of modern day Turkey. Paul is quite concerned because it appears that there are some “false believers” who actually want the church in Galatia to rely on rules, regulations, feasts, celebrations and the Law rather than relying on Jesus for their salvation (cf. Galatians 3:10, 4:9,10 cf. also Deuteronomy 27:26).

As far as 2 Peter is concerned, it is most likely that this letter was written in Rome also sometime in the first Century. If we accept that Peter was the author of the letter then it would have also have been written before the conclusion of Nero’s reign (ca. 64 CE) as tradition has it that Peter was martyred under Emperor Nero by being crucified upside down on a cross.

The Book of Jude has been called the most neglected book in the New Testament. The author of this letter is probably either the disciple named Judas (not Judas Iscariot because, among other reasons, he was dead when this letter was written: Matthew 27:3-8, Acts 1:18-19) or more likely this Jude is Jesus’ biological brother, Judas (cf. Jude 1:1; cf. also Matthew 13:55, John 7:3-10, Acts 1:14, 1 Corinthians 9:5, Galatians 1:19). In Verse 1 the author identifies himself as James’ brother. James was another one of Jesus’ brothers and a very prominent figure in the early Christian Church in Jerusalem. This letter was written pretty early on in the history of the Church: probably not more than forty years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Church is still really quite small at this point. It is not worldwide like today. It is still really new when this letter is written. Judas, Jude is writing this letter to faithful and earnest Christians who are in the early Church (cf. 1:3,4; Matthew 7:15-20, 24:11; Mark 13:22; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:1, 4:3-4; 2 Peter 3:3).

Read James 1:19-26

James 1:19-21

1. What does it mean to be quick to listen and slow to speak and become angry?

2. Why must we do this?

3. How do we do this?

James 1:22-27

1. Why should we not just listen to the word?

2. What does it mean to just listen to the word? What does that look like today?

3. How do we do what it says instead of just listening to the word?

4. What is the 'religion' that God accepts as pure and faultless?

Read James 2:12-26

James 2:12-19

1. How should we speak and act?

2. What does it mean that faith without deeds is dead?

3. Is simply believing that there is a God going to guarantee one eternal life with Christ?

James 2:20-26

1. What is the evidence provided that 'faith without deeds is useless'?

2. How is it that a person is considered righteous?

What does all this mean for us today?

Read 2 Peter 3

2 Peter 3:1-10

1. Why is Peter writing?
2. What is going to happen in the 'last days'? Is that happening now?
3. What did people intentionally forget?
4. What should we not forget and why?

2 Peter 3:11-16

1. Since everything will be destroyed like this, how should we act?
2. What is going to happen to the heaven(s) and earth after it is laid bare by fire?
3. How are we to act while waiting for everything to be made anew?
4. What should we bear in mind while we are awaiting the re-creation of heaven and earth?

2 Peter 3:17-18

1. Why is Peter's warning here so important?
2. What will happen if believers are 'carried away by the error of the lawless'?
3. Instead of this happening what should we do?

What does all this mean for us today?

Read Jude 1

Jude 1:3-16

1. To whom did Jude write this letter?
2. Why did Jude write this letter?
3. Where here is it mentioned that there are the ungodly people and what do they do?
4. What happened to some who were saved from Egypt?
5. What happened to some angels who were already living in their 'proper dwellings'?
6. What does Verse 16 say is about these people?

Jude 1:17-25

1. What must we remember?
2. What must we do
3. Why does Verse 21 record that must we do this?
4. Who is able to keep us from stumbling and present as faultless?

What does all this mean for us today?

Excerpt from *Grace and Works: a Look at Doctrines 5-10 of The Salvation Army* by Captain Michael Ramsay

Doctrine 9 may be read almost as a counter-balance to the justification by faith expressed in the eighth doctrine. It is one that will need to be explored a little more in depth. It is certainly one of our more controversial doctrines: *continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ* ‘Depends’ is the main point of contention in this doctrine. It is the lynchpin of many an argument made rationally and theologically that our position is purely a doctrine of works.

Does our Salvation depend upon our works? If it does, would it follow that we could earn our Salvation? This sounds like the debates of the first century Church pertaining to circumcision (cf. Acts 15, Romans 2-4, Galatians 5:1-5), meat sacrificed to idols (cf. 1 Corinthians 8), and dietary laws (cf. Acts 10, 15; Galatians 2:11-21). Are we, by this doctrine, as some have suggested, “...putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10). If so, it would seem to contradict The Salvation

Army's eighth doctrine. How can one be justified by grace and not have one's salvation secured? Will God change His mind? Will He suddenly decide to 'harden your heart' (cf. Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 9:12) or send an evil spirit to torment you? (cf. 1 Samuel 16:14) Will he say that he never knew you? (cf. Matthew 7:23)

Salvation Story offers an interesting response to this line of questioning: on initial examination it apparently, for our part, reinterprets the word 'depends' as 'is evidenced by' and leaves the conditional work entirely to Christ. "We remember that an ongoing union with Christ *depends on his work* and not our feelings...Such assurance must be affirmed daily by obedience and never made an excuse for carelessness or complacent presumption. It is the changed life that *evidence* for the work of grace within." 'Obedience' is mentioned in the preceding comment; 'dependency' - as our part - is not. The argument seems thus far to state that our continued Salvation depends not on our continued obedient faith but rather on Christ's work. "We believe that God, who has accepted and saved us and given us eternal life, has given us also the assurance of our standing in him." These statements on 'assurance' appear to read more like an acceptance of a doctrine of 'perseverance of saints' than one of 'conditional perseverance.'

This assurance, however, is seemingly unsecured for "assurance does not mean that our salvation is guaranteed to us against our own free will. It is possible to cease to obey Christ and so to forfeit our hope of eternal life. This is consistent with our understanding of the grace of God, who always leaves us open to respond freely to him. Freedom to live by grace includes freedom to turn away." The Salvation Army then allows for the much accepted Christian doctrine of the eternal loss of the apostate. If one does not renounce God but displays no 'continued obedient faith', does one forfeit one's salvation? How does it relate to backsliders?

"Backsliding, then, is possible for true Christians. It can occur through the deliberate rejection of Christ, or, more insidiously, when we drift from the way of discipleship or neglect the means of grace. This does not mean that every time we sin we slide away from the grace of God. Even our many failures will not deprive us of the Holy Spirit's presence if we turn to him for forgiveness and restoration. When we live a life of continued obedient faith in Christ we need not fall from grace and be eternally lost."

This returns the discussion to an earlier question: does the Salvation Army really believe that one's Salvation is dependent upon one's continued obedience or - excepting apostasy - does it merely believe it to be evidence of one's Salvation? "Our Salvation is assured as long as we

continue to exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Such faith is expressed in obedience to his leadings, will and commands [1 John 2:3-6]. Obedience as a free-will choice is a consequence of faith, and without it, faith dies. Our conversion inaugurates a journey during which we are being transformed into Christ's likeness. Thus Salvation is neither a state to be preserved nor an insurance policy, which requires no further investment. It is the beginning of a pilgrimage with Christ."

The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; Salvation as a pilgrimage is a good analogy. It takes us from our initial contact with the Lord through to sanctification: "it was for [holiness] we were born and to fall short of this will be infinite, eternal loss, and doom us to an everlasting night of shame and contempt." "Our walk with Him must be constant...or else we will seek for Him some day and not find Him." We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Salvation Army actually does then observe that a continuance in a state of Salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

Further Reading

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