

Only One Way of Salvation

J.C. Ryle

Is there more than one road to Heaven? Is there more than one way in which the soul of man can be saved? This is the question which I propose to consider in this paper, and I shall begin the consideration by quoting a text of Scripture: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

These words are striking in themselves; but they are much more striking if we observe when and by whom they were spoken. They were spoken by a poor and friendless Christian, in the midst of a persecuting Jewish Council. It was a grand confession of Christ.

They were spoken by the lips of the Apostle Peter. This is the man who, a few weeks before, forsook Jesus and fled: this is the very man who three times over denied his Lord. There is another spirit in him now! He stands up boldly before priests and Sadducees, and tells them the truth to their face: "This is the stone that was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

First, let me explain the doctrine laid down by St. Peter.

Let us make sure that we rightly understand what the Apostle means. He says of Christ, "Neither is there salvation in any other." Now what does this mean? On our clearly seeing this very much depends.

He means that no one can be saved from sin – its guilt, its power, and its consequences – excepting by Jesus Christ. He means that no one can have peace with God the Father – obtain pardon in this world, and escape wrath to come in the next – excepting through the atonement and mediation of Jesus Christ.

In Christ alone God's rich provision of salvation for sinners is treasured up: by Christ alone God's abundant mercies come down from Heaven to Earth. Christ's blood alone can cleanse us; Christ's righteousness alone can clothe us; Christ's merit alone can give us a title to Heaven. Jews and Gentiles, learned and unlearned, kings and poor men – all alike must either be saved by the Lord Jesus, or lost forever.

And the Apostle adds emphatically, "There is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." There is no other person commissioned, sealed, and appointed by God the Father to be the Saviour of sinners, excepting Christ. The keys of life and death are committed to His hand, and all who would be saved must go to Him.

There was but one place of safety in the day when the flood came upon the Earth: that place was Noah's ark. All other places and devices – mountains, towers, trees, rafts, boats – all were alike useless. So also there is but one hiding-place for the sinner who would escape the storm of God's anger; he must venture his soul on Christ.

There was but one man to whom the Egyptians could go in time of famine, when they wanted food: They must go to Joseph; it was a waste of time to go to anyone else. So also there is but One to whom hungry souls must go, if they would not perish forever: they must go to Christ. There was but one word that could save the lives of the Ephraimites in the day when the Gileadites contended

with them, and took the fords of Jordan (Judges 12): They must say "Shibboleth," or die. Just so there is but one Name that will avail us when we stand at the gate of Heaven: we must name the Name of Jesus as our only hope, or be cast away everlastingly.

Such is the doctrine of the text. "No salvation but by Jesus Christ; in Him plenty of salvation – salvation to the uttermost, salvation for the very chief of sinners; out of Him no salvation at all." It is in perfect harmony with our Lord's own words in St. John's Gospel – "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). It is the same thing that Paul tells the Corinthians: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). And it is the same that St. John tells us in his first Epistle: "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12). All these texts come to one and the same point – no salvation but by Jesus Christ.

Let us make sure that we understand this before we pass on. Men are apt to think, "This is all old news; these are ancient things: who knoweth not such truths as these? Of course, we believe there is no salvation but by Christ." But I ask my readers to mark well what I say. Make sure that you understand this doctrine, or else by and by you will stumble, and be offended at the statements I have yet to make in this paper.

We are to venture the whole salvation of our souls on Christ, and on Christ only. We are to cast loose completely and entirely from all other hopes and trusts. We are not to rest partly on Christ, partly on doing all we can, partly on keeping our church, partly on receiving the sacrament. In the matter of our justification Christ is to be all. This is the doctrine of the text.

Heaven is before us, and Christ the only door into it; Hell beneath us, and Christ alone able to deliver us from it; the devil behind us, and Christ the only refuge from his wrath and accusations; the law against us, and Christ alone able to redeem us; sin weighing us down, and Christ alone able to put it away. This is the doctrine of the text.

Now do we see it? I hope we do. But I fear many think so who may find, before laying down this paper that they do not....

Truth and Love

There are few parts of the subject which seem to me to be more important than this. The truth I have been trying to set before my readers bears so strongly on the condition of a great proportion of mankind, that I consider it would be mere affectation on my part not to say something about it. If Christ is the only way of salvation, what are we to feel about many people in the world? This is the point I am now going to take up.

I believe that many persons would go with me so far as I have gone, and would go no further. They will allow my premises: They will have nothing to say to my conclusions. They think it uncharitable to say anything which appears to condemn others. For my part I cannot understand such charity. It seems to me the kind of charity which would see a neighbour drinking slow poison, but never interfere to stop him; which would allow emigrants to embark in a leaky, ill-found vessel, and not interfere to prevent them; which would see a blind man walking near a precipice, and think it wrong to cry out, and tell him there was danger.

The greatest charity is to tell the greatest quantity of truth. It is no charity to hide the legitimate consequences of such a saying of St. Peter as we are now considering, or to shut our eyes against them. And I solemnly call on every one who really believes there is no salvation in any but Christ – and none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved – I solemnly call on

that person to give me his attention, while I set before him some of the tremendous consequences which the doctrine we are considering involves....

Uselessness of Religion

One mighty consequence, then, which seems to be learned from the text which forms the keynote of this paper, is the utter uselessness of any religion without Christ.

There are many to be found in Christendom at this day who have a religion of this kind. They would not like to be called Deists, but Deists they are. That there is a God, that there is what they are pleased to call Providence, that God is merciful, that there will be a state after death – this is about the sum and substance of their creed; and as to the distinguishing tenets of Christianity, they do not seem to recognize them at all. Now I denounce such a system as a baseless fabric – its seeming foundation man's fancy – its hopes an utter delusion. The god of such people is an idol of their own invention, and not the glorious God of the Scriptures – a miserably imperfect being, even on their own showing, without holiness, without justice, without any attribute but that of vague, indiscriminate mercy. Such a religion may possibly do as a toy to live with: It is far too unreal to die with. It utterly fails to meet the wants of man's conscience: It offers no remedy; it affords no rest for the soles of our feet; it cannot comfort, for it cannot save. Let us beware of it, if we love life. Let us beware of a religion without Christ.

Another consequence to be learned from the text is, the folly of any religion in which Christ has not the first place. I need not remind my readers how many hold a system of this kind. The Socinian tells us that Christ was a mere man; that His blood had no more efficacy than that of another; that His death on the cross was not a real atonement and propitiation of man's sins; and that, after all, doing is the way to Heaven, and not believing. I solemnly declare that I believe such a system is ruinous to men's souls. It seems to me to strike at the root of the whole plan of salvation which God has revealed in the Bible, and practically to nullify the greater part of the Scriptures. It overthrows the priesthood of the Lord Jesus, and strips Him of His office. It converts the whole system of the law of Moses, touching sacrifices and ordinances, into a meaningless form. It seems to say that the sacrifice of Cain was just as good as the sacrifice of Abel. It turns man adrift on a sea of uncertainty, by plucking from under him the finished work of a divine Mediator. Let us beware of it, no less than of Deism, if we love life. Let us beware of the least attempt to depreciate and undervalue Christ's Person, offices or work. The name whereby alone we can be saved, is a name above every name, and the slightest contempt poured upon it is an insult to the King of kings. The salvation of our souls has been laid by God the Father on Christ, and no other. If He were not very God of very God, He never could accomplish it, and there could be no salvation at all.

Another consequence to be learned from our text is the great error committed by those who add anything to Christ as necessary to salvation. It is an easy thing to profess belief in the Trinity, and reverence for our Lord Jesus Christ, and yet to make some addition to Christ as the ground of hope, and so to overthrow the doctrine of the text as really and completely as by denying it altogether.

The Church of Rome does this systematically. She adds things to Christianity over and above the requirements of the Gospel, of her own invention. She speaks as if Christ's finished work was not a sufficient foundation for a sinner's soul, and as if it were not enough to say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." She sends men to priests and confessors, to penances and absolution, to masses and extreme unction, to fasting and bodily mortification, to the Virgin Mary and the saints – as if these things could add to the safety there is in Christ Jesus. And in doing this she sins against the doctrine of God's Word with a high hand. Let us beware of any Romish hankering after additions to the simple way of the Gospel, from whatever quarter it may come....

Sincerity

The last consequence which seems to me to be learned from our text is the utter absurdity of supposing that we ought to be satisfied with a man's state of soul, if he is only earnest and sincere.

This is a very common heresy indeed, and one against which we all need to be on our guard. There are thousands who say in the present day, "We have nothing to do with the opinions of others. They may perhaps be mistaken, though it is possible they are right and we wrong: but, if they are sincere and earnest, we hope they will be saved, even as we." And all this sounds liberal and charitable, and people like to fancy their own views are so! To such an extreme length has this erroneous idea run, that many are content to describe a Christian as "an earnest man," and seem to think this vague definition is quite sufficient!

Now I believe such notions are entirely contradictory to the Bible, whatever else they may be. I cannot find in Scripture that any one ever got to Heaven merely by sincerity, or was accepted with God if he was only earnest in maintaining his own views. The priests of Baal were earnest and sincere when they cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out; but that did not prevent Elijah from commanding them to be treated as wicked idolaters. Manasseh, King of Judah, was doubtless earnest and sincere when he burned his children in the fire to Moloch; but who does not know that he brought on himself great guilt by so doing? The Apostle Paul, when a Pharisee, was earnest and sincere while he made havoc of the Church, but when his eyes were opened he mourned over this special wickedness. Let us beware of allowing for a moment that sincerity is everything, and that we have no right to speak ill of a man's spiritual state because of the opinions he holds, if he is only earnest in holding them. On such principles, the Druidical sacrifices, the car of Juggernaut, the Indian suttees, the systematic murders of the Thugs, the fires of Smithfield might each and all be defended. It will not stand: It will not bear the test of Scripture. Once allow such notions to be true, and we may as well throw our Bibles aside altogether. Sincerity is not Christ, and therefore sincerity cannot put away sin.

I dare be sure these consequences sound very unpleasant to the minds of some who may read them. But I say, calmly and advisedly, that a religion without Christ, a religion that takes away from Christ, a religion that adds anything to Christ, a religion that puts sincerity in the place of Christ – all are dangerous: All are to be avoided, because all are alike contrary to the doctrine of Scripture.

Some readers may not like this. I am sorry for it. They think me uncharitable, illiberal, narrow-minded, bigoted, and so forth. Be it so. But they will not tell me my doctrine is not that of the Word of God and of the Church of England, whose minister I am. That doctrine is, salvation in Christ to the very uttermost – but out of Christ no salvation at all.

Relativism

I feel it a duty to bear my solemn testimony against the spirit of the day we live in, to warn men against its infection. It is not Atheism I fear so much, in the present times, as Pantheism. It is not the system which says nothing is true, so much as the system which says everything is true. It is not the system which says there is no Saviour, so much as the system which says there are many saviours, and many ways to peace! – It is the system which is so liberal, that it dares not say anything is false. It is the system which is so charitable, that it will allow everything to be true. It is the system which seems ready to honour others as well as our Lord Jesus Christ, to class them all together, and to think well of all. Confucius and Zoroaster, Socrates and Mahomet, the Indian Brahmins and the African devil-worshippers, Arius and Pelagius, Ignatius Loyola and Socinus – all are to be treated respectfully; none is to be condemned. It is the system which bids us smile complacently on all creeds and systems of religion. The Bible and the Koran, the Hindu Vedas and

the Persian Zendavesta, the old wives' fables of Rabbinical writers and the rubbish of Patristic traditions, the Racovian catechism and the Thirty-nine Articles, the revelations of Emanuel Swedenborg and the Book of Mormon of Joseph Smith – all, all are to be listened to: None is to be denounced as lies. It is the system which is so scrupulous about the feelings of others, that we are never to say they are wrong. It is the system which is so liberal that it calls a man a bigot, if he dares to say, "I know my views are right." This is the system, this is the tone of feeling which I fear in this day, and this is the system which I desire emphatically to testify against and denounce.

What is it all but a bowing down before a great idol, speciously called liberality? What is it all but a sacrificing of truth upon the altar of a caricature of charity? What is it all but the worship of a shadow, a phantom, and an unreality? What can be more absurd than to profess ourselves content with "earnestness," when we do not know what we are earnest about? Let us take heed lest we are carried away by the delusion. Has the Lord God spoken to us in the Bible, or has He not? Has He shown us the way of salvation plainly and distinctly in that Bible, or has He not? Has He declared to us the dangerous state of all out of that way, or has He not? Let us gird up the loins of our minds, and look these questions fairly in the face, and give them an honest answer. Tell us that there is some other inspired book beside the Bible, and then we shall know what you mean. Tell us that the whole Bible is not inspired, and then we shall know where to meet you. But grant for a moment that the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible is God's truth, and then I know not in what way we can escape the doctrine of the text. From the liberality which says everybody is right, from the charity which forbids us to say anybody is wrong, from the peace which is bought at the expense of truth – may the good Lord deliver us!

For my own part, I frankly confess, I find no resting-place between downright distinct Evangelical Christianity and downright infidelity, whatever others may find. I see no half-way house between them; or else I see the houses that are roofless and cannot shelter my weary soul. I can see consistency in an infidel, however much I may pity him. I can see consistency in the full maintenance of Evangelical truth. But as to a middle course between the two – I cannot see it; and I say so plainly. Let it be called illiberal and uncharitable. I can hear God's voice nowhere except in the Bible, and I can see no salvation for sinners in the Bible excepting through Jesus Christ. In Him I see abundance; out of Him I see none. And as for those who hold religions in which Christ is not all, whoever they may be, I have a most uncomfortable feeling about their safety. I do not for a moment say that none of them will be saved; but I say that those who are saved will be saved by their disagreement with their own principles, and in spite of their own systems. The man who wrote the famous line, "He can't be wrong whose life is in the right," was a great poet undoubtedly, but he was a wretched divine....

No Other Name

If there is no salvation excepting in Christ, let us try to do good to the souls of all who do not know Him as a Saviour. There are millions in this miserable condition – millions in foreign lands, millions in our own country, millions who are not trusting in Christ. We ought to feel for them if we are true Christians; we ought to pray for them; we ought to work for them, while there is yet time. Do we really believe that Christ is the only way to Heaven? Then let us live as if we believed it.

Let us look round the circle of our own relatives and friends, count them up one by one, and think how many of them are not yet in Christ. Let us try to do good to them in some way or other, and act as a man should act who believes his friends to be in danger. Let us not be content with their being kind and amiable, gentle and good-tempered, moral and courteous. Let us rather be miserable about them till they come to Christ, and trust in Him. I know all this may sound like enthusiasm and fanaticism. I wish there were more of it in the world. Anything, I am sure, is better than a quiet indifference about the souls of others, as if everybody was on the way to Heaven. Nothing, to my mind, so proves our little faith, as our little feeling about the spiritual condition of

those around us...

This is the true charity, to believe all things and hope all things, so long as we see Bible doctrines maintained and Christ exalted. Christ must be the single standard by which all opinions must be measured. Let us honour all who honour Him; but let us never forget that the same apostle Paul who wrote about charity, says also, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema." If our charity and liberality are wider than that of the Bible, they are worth nothing at all. Indiscriminate love is no love at all, and indiscriminate approbation of all religious opinions, is only a new name for infidelity. Let us hold out the right hand to all who love the Lord Jesus, but let us beware how we go beyond this.

Lastly, if there is no salvation excepting by Christ, we must not be surprised if ministers of the Gospel preach much about Him. They cannot tell us too much about the Name which is above every name. We cannot hear of Him too often. We may hear too much about controversy in sermons; we may hear too much of works and duties, of forms, of ceremonies, of sacraments and ordinances; but there is one subject which we never hear too much of: We can never hear too much of Christ.

When ministers are wearied of preaching Him, they are false ministers. When people are wearied of hearing of Him, their souls are in an unhealthy state. When ministers have preached Him in all their lives, the half of His excellence will remain untold. When hearers see Him face to face in the day of His appearing, they will find there was more in Him than their hearts ever conceived.

Marked up by Lance George Marshall