

The Salvation of the Soul, Part 1

Principles for Interpretation

The Bible gives us four basic truths that serve as principles to guide us in interpretation. If these truths are embraced, they will prevent us from making errors in our interpretation.

#1 The Bible is True (2 Tim 3:16-17), therefore it will never contradict itself.

#2 People Are Justified by Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, in Jesus Christ Alone (Romans 3:24).

#3 Once Saved, Always Saved (John 5:24; Rom 8:38-39). Eternal Security is just that: Safe Forever!

#4 The Bema Concerns Believers (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10). This involves rewards, not loss of justification.

Also, as it is with any form of good reading comprehension, context is key! The context will always clarify what the author means.¹

The Mind's Immediate Hindrance

The phrase "The Salvation of the Soul" may draw your mind to conclude that the word "salvation" means "to go to heaven when I die" or something similar. This automatic reaction has immediately placed the matters of "Heaven & Hell" at the forefront of our thinking and has created a great hindrance to understanding the text.

We must remember that "salvation" has three spiritual tenses (justification, sanctification, glorification) and numerous physical aspects ("deliverance, rescue, healing, safety"). Context will always determine the meaning intended by the author. Additionally, keeping the four basic truths above in mind will guard us from the dangers of any "works-salvation" conclusions.

Pertinent Passages

James 1:21

The book of "James" is all about choices and attitudes that lead to the salvation of the soul. This book is written to believers (1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 12, 19), therefore any notion that James' readers are not redeemed people is nonsense. James verifies their redemption in 1:18- "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." This shows us that "the Word of God is the agency by which faith is generated."² Consideration of the context is essential to understand what James means by saving one's soul.

Trials are the author's main focus, to which he immediately exhorts his readers to a joyful attitude and faithful endurance (1:2-4). He espouses "joy" because God is using this trial in developing the believer. Despite how one may feel in the midst of hardship, the believer can be certain that this situation is being used by God for his or her growth. Knowing this should immediately bring light to the

¹ Jeremy Edmondson, *Getting Started: Basics to Understanding Your Bible* (Allen, TX: Bold Grace Ministries, 2013). Available on Amazon Kindle.

² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1983), 1:121.

trying situation. “Endurance” (“steadfastness”) is commanded because it is the only pathway to the believer being “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:4). The temptation will be to rescue oneself out of a trying situation (1:3) and doing so, will cut short the opportunity to grow up in Christ to full maturity.

In developing his argument, James later tells us that the one who “perseveres under trial,” having “passed the test” (meaning not cutting the trial short), will receive “the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (1:12). Enduring the hardship by trusting the Lord gives way to reward! Take note that it is a love for the Lord that serves as the motivation for this reward and not the reward itself. This “crown” is a *stephanos* being “the wreath or garland which was given as a prize to victors in the public games.”³ Comparing this passage with Revelation 2:10 we see that the “crown of life” has two requirements for obtaining it. First, one must “pass the test” of their hardship, which would be synonymous with faithful endurance. Second, such endurance is done because of one’s affection for Christ. This sets the attitude of the believer in relation to Christ at center stage. Apart from these two things, the believer in Christ will not receive this reward.

After explaining that God is not responsible for one’s sin (1:13), how sin leads to death (1:14-15), and that God gives only good things to His children (1:17), James then gives an outline for the book in being quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger (wrath) in 1:19. He explains that our personal wrath is never a means of bringing forth the righteousness of God in our trials (1:20). Righteous results should always be the end goal of our trials.

At this point, James offers a sound directive for how believers can operate righteously in their earthly life. Take note of each of the points in 1:21...

“Therefore,...” -In light of the fact that man’s anger will not produce God’s righteousness...

“*putting aside...*” -This phrase literally means “to strip off.”

“*all filthiness (moral defilement) and the abundance of wickedness (vice, depravity)...*,” - meaning those fleshly behaviors & impurities that come so naturally to the old man. These things are all hindrances to what comes next!⁴

NEGATIVE

“*in humility...*” –“the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance.”⁵ An attitude or demeanor that emphasizes bringing one’s self low.

“*receive the word implanted...*” -Welcome the Word of God as the means to producing righteousness in your life. It is already “implanted,” meaning that the Word is “inborn.”

“*which is able to save your souls.*” -The humble reception of the inborn Word can rescue us from wrathful conclusions to our trials, cutting them short, and stunting our path to spiritual maturity (1:4). This gives clarity to the redemptive purpose of the Word (2 Tim 3:16-17).

POSITIVE

³ Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 587.

⁴ Arlen L. Chitwood, *The Salvation of the Soul: Saving of the Life* (Norman, OK: The Lamp Broadcast, Inc., 2003) 37.

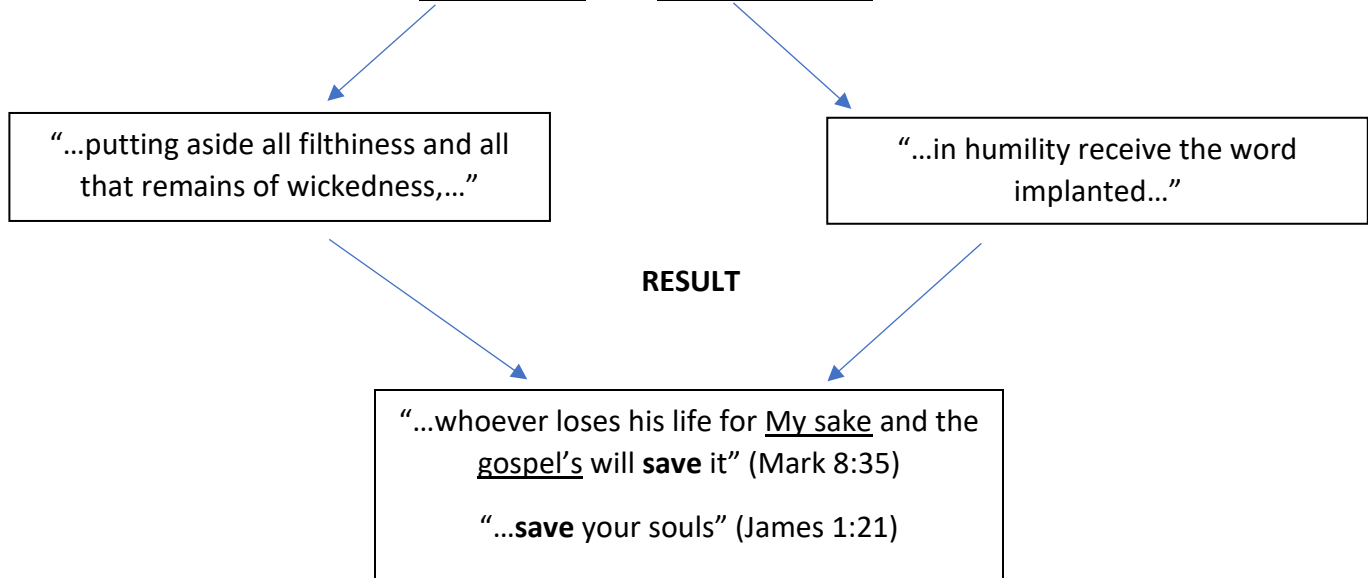
⁵ BDAG, 861.

James follows up this verse with “the ancient principle” - Not being “hearers only” but doers of the Word. To have the Word implanted and NOT apply the Word to our daily lives is to live fraudulently (1:22). The one who forsakes the humble reception of the Word of God will not save their soul.

Mark 8:34-35 & James 1:21

“If anyone wishes to come after Me,...

he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.



It should be evident that humility is the essential starting place in the salvation of the soul. To deny one’s self is to consider something else greater than our wants and desires. This requires humility. “Filthiness” and “wickedness” are things that we are used to, and they are qualities that often characterize the things that we use to serve ourselves, appease our wants, and satisfy our desires. Again, such things are hindrances to saving the soul. Humility is the cure for these hindrances, allowing us to receive the Word.

The Body of James’ Letter

James covers some serious ground for the Christian in relation to “doing the Word.”

- Avoiding favoritism within the Body of Christ (2:1-11).
- Being merciful in our treatment of our brothers and sisters, knowing that such a demeanor will bring about a merciful judgment from Christ (2:12-13).
- Good deeds are a benefit to the Body of Christ, while also serving to energize one’s faith (2:14-26). By serving others, the believer in Christ is “saved” from a merciless judgment before Christ (2:12-14).
- Teachers of the Word will incur a stricter judgment before the Lord. The tongue is the litmus test of whether or not one is walking in righteousness (3:1-12).
- Good behavior in the Body of Christ speaks louder than words. Jealousy and selfishness are qualities of the evil one. Godly wisdom produces fruit when exercised in good deeds (3:13-18).

- Selfishness produces wrath, making it a hindrance to righteousness being produced in the believer's life. The cure for selfishness is humble submission to God. This will bring purity to our lives. We are no longer to live in judgment of others. Instead, we are to look to the Lord's will for our living (4:1-17).
- The want of riches increases our selfishness, which again produces wrath and anger (5:1-6).
- The believer who seeks to produce righteousness in the midst of their trial looks to wait patiently upon the Lord in the light of His imminent return (5:7-12).
- James offers a series of prescriptions for those who are struggling with sickness and sin (5:13-18).

This series of inter-related topics leads up to the next passage under consideration.

James 5:19-20

By beginning with "my brethren" any doubt about the regenerate state of James' audience is again laid to rest (5:19). The mention of "any among you" further stipulates that believers are in view, though one "strays from the truth." The word "strays" is the idea of "losing their way." We may be more comfortable understanding this man as a "backslider." Considering the overall subject of the book, this believer may have lost their way because they used sin as an escape from the trial that they were facing. Though we can't be certain of the reason, the responsibility is placed upon this person's fellow-believers to "turn him back." Believers are responsible for addressing other believers who have strayed into sin.

With v.20, James is laying forth the significance of brothers and sisters in Christ mounting up a rescue mission for their wayward family member. The one who has strayed is labeled a "sinner." Such a designation is appropriate because they are found to be in a way of error. The believer who takes the incentive to turn them back around to the truth will "save his soul from death." "Death represents the temporal destruction of the person, not his or her eternal damnation."⁶ This could be seen in the form of divine discipline, physical death, or James could mean the eventual ruin of one's life. This would be consistent to his comments in 1:14-15 which reads, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." The Bible's definition of "death" always involves "separation" from something. Since the soul will be saved when the believer is turned around, we would conclude that the "soul" is what was in danger of dying, or (to be consistent with Jesus' words) losing his soul (Mark 8:35), forfeiting his soul (Mark 8:36), and exchanging his soul (Mark 8:37).

How should we understand the comment on covering "a multitude of sins?" All sin has been paid for on the cross (1 John 2:2). When we speak of being "justified by faith" (Rom 3:24-26) we understand this as a legal declaration of righteousness in God's sight. This is a judicial situation that establishes our **relationship** with the Father. Sins committed in a believer's life are in need of confession (1 John 1:9) because such choices disrupt the **fellowship** that we would normally enjoy with the Father. Turning a sinning believer back to the Lord covers the sins committed because **fellowship** has been restored. This reveals an important truth: "The Salvation of the Soul" is an issue of **fellowship**, **NOT** relationship.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Jas 5:20.