



"Without God there is no virtue because there is no prompting of the conscience."

—Ronald Reagan

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Is It Salvational? (Part One)

A short time ago, a man asked me about some doctrines that the church believes. In the course of our conversation, he brought up the [Sabbath](#). He noted that we keep the Sabbath and [the holy days](#), deeming them to be good things. He could see from Scripture that the Sabbath was on the seventh day and commended the church for observing it. Yet he mentioned that he was also impressed by Sunday-keepers who keep the [first day of the week](#) with conviction and will sacrifice for it. Then he concluded that, really, which day one observes "is not salvational."

Of course, people equivocating with the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath is not new, but the phrase he used warrants consideration as it is often used regarding any number of biblical areas. Even within the church of [God](#), members sometimes pronounce the same judgment about various matters that may seem minor. We hear, "Well, it isn't salvational . . .," and that often ends the discussion.

However, whether a matter is salvational is the wrong question. There is a better question and another approach to evaluating matters that will put us on better footing as we make decisions in the course of life.

The critical turning point in mankind's history came as our first parents allowed themselves to be turned from God:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ([Genesis 3:1-5](#))

The serpent says in verse 4, "You will not surely die." He does not use the word "salvation," for, at this point, Eve does not need to be saved from anything. The essence of what he says is, "This isn't salvational." He declares, "This won't incur the death penalty. It's actually a good thing."

The serpent's words give us a pattern to be aware of. First, he inserts doubt about what God said and meant and follows up by talking about penalties and benefits. He claims that ignoring God will not trigger the death penalty, but instead it would give Eve God-like knowledge. Certainly, penalties and benefits are not bad things to think about; they are part of any thorough evaluation. However, [Satan](#) mutes one major issue in his temptations. He leaves out how their choices will affect their relationships with God.

Bear in mind that Adam and Eve had what nobody else has ever had: a relationship with their Creator in which they saw Him, heard Him, spoke with Him, and even more, had complete [peace](#) with Him. To this point, they had done nothing against that relationship; their fellowship with Him was completely undefiled by [sin](#). They were in God's presence without any shame ([Genesis 2:25](#)). After they sinned, though, shame entered their minds, as did improper fear, something else they had not known.

[Genesis 3:8](#) records that they hid from their Creator, indicating that they had been accustomed to spending time with Him in the Garden before their sin.

He was no stranger to them. How much would that kind of interaction with God be worth to us? What value would we place on visible and audible fellowship with the epitome of all personalities, with nothing negative and everything of benefit passing between God and us, and nothing spoiled by iniquity?

This is what Adam and Eve had, for a time, but they ruined it when Eve fell for the serpent's misdirection. He blunted the penalty that God had promised and suggested that she and her husband choose for themselves what is good and what is evil. God was right in the Garden with them, so it would have been simple to seek clarification. Instead, it appears they acted in the moment—thus without [wisdom](#), not valuing God's perspective.

Instead of asking, "Is it salvational?" a better question is, "Is it *relational*?" In other words, rather than focusing on whether we think an action will keep us out of the Kingdom, a better way to evaluate is to consider what a given course of action will do to our relationship with God. As we will see next time, salvation and eternal life come through that relationship, not merely through avoiding sin. That relationship is affected by everything we do.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Plan of Salvation in Genesis 3:15](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Reading holds a child's attention because of the gripping stories with riveting plots. Some educators maintain that morals are shaped more by stories than by any other factor. Stories enable them to grasp the essential moral, filing it away in the mental storage cabinet, accessible for the rest of their lives. Stories ignite the imaginations of children, allowing them to think about people, places, and situations they have never experienced before, learning the rudiments of how to handle themselves. Good stories should contain positive moral lessons. The story children learn the best is the one we parents act out in our daily lives. God uses many stories in His written Word,

teaching us deep spiritual lessons. Jesus Christ taught using parables, stoking the minds of the listener with sharp and vivid images. The temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan and their subsequent transgression led to three prophecies or judgments, a kind of protevangelium or "first gospel," a glimpse of God's plan to remedy this grim situation. The conflict ends with the protagonist, Christ (the Seed of the woman), destroying the antagonist, Satan. The redemption of man involves a new nature, given through God's grace and totally at enmity with Satan's nature. The process of redemption will involve the gathering of a small elect group in perpetual conflict with the seed of the serpent. Here is the true beginning of the gospel.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Are the Sabbath and Holy Days Done Away?](#)

by Earl L. Henn

In order to justify not keeping the Sabbath, many use Colossians 2:16-17 as proof that Paul did not command it. Earl Henn exposes this conclusion as pure fiction!

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