
The Salvation Process

BOB HEERSPINK

More and more people are talking about spirituality, being spiritual; and yet, church attendance is dwindling. Why do you think so many people are attracted to the teachings of Jesus, but turned off by the teachings of Christianity? Has the institution of church distorted Christ's message? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into the scriptures to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink. Dave, Saul of Tarsus, or the Apostle Paul, as we more typically know him, is certainly one of the most famous people in all of Christian history, and yet he is a divisive character in many people's minds. People think of him as being a woman hater, they say he is homophobic. Some people even say he took this beautiful, simple message of Christianity and he turned it into a very heavy, harsh, dogmatic set of doctrines that is Christianity today.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I just ran across a reference to a book title on a blog the other day called *Paul and the Invention of Christianity*, and that is actually claimed in some circles that Jesus, you know, was a wonderful, gentle, spiritual guru sort of a teacher of love and tolerance and acceptance, and then along came the disciples – his followers – who kind of twisted his message, and chief villain among them is Paul, the apostle, who was hardnosed and dogmatic, and he brought in all this stuff about predestination and the Trinity and propitiation; all these foreign concepts; and just really ruined the whole thing. In fact, here is a comment from our website from someone who writes: Jesus teaches love, acceptance, humility. He taught about a personal relationship with our Father. On the other hand, the dogmas of Christianity have been used to justify so much hate, killing, persecution and repression, and so on. The dogmas of Christianity are almost in complete conflict with the teachings of Jesus. Why was he sent here? To usher us into the Age of Grace, and out of the age of dogma.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think we can sympathize with some of those feelings because it does seem sometimes that the Church has lost a sense of love and compassion for people. The history of the Church is marked by abuse, we know that.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and to our shame, doctrine or dogma has been used to persecute at times one branch of Christianity against the other. So, right; and certainly we agree that Jesus was wonderful – a wonderful teacher who taught love and forgiveness.

BOB HEERSPINK

But it is not fair to say that Paul invented doctrine. The truth of the matter is, he got his doctrine – he got his teachings – from Jesus Christ.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, we believe that ultimately what the apostles taught, and chief among them the Apostle Paul... he did, after all, write much of the New Testament. It doesn't come from them, it comes from Jesus; that is to say, it comes ultimately from God, and also from the scriptures of the Old Testament. In fact, we have been looking at the resurrection appearances of Christ in these programs, and Luke says in the opening of Acts, in Acts 1:3, that he appeared to them for forty days. I mean, most of us know that. That is why there are forty days between Easter and the Ascension; but he says that during those forty days he appeared to them with "many convincing proofs," and he talked to them about the kingdom of God. So the reason for this time of appearing was first of all to convince the disciples that he truly was risen; that took some doing...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And then to teach them.

BOB HEERSPINK

If you go to Luke Chapter 24, there is a text there in which, really, Luke summarizes what Jesus taught. It says: ⁴⁵Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures; ⁴⁶and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead; ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations."

Now, that is a great summary of the Gospel, and it comes right from Jesus himself; and it is really focusing on the same doctrinal truths that Paul puts front and center in his Gospel.

DAVE BAST

On his death, his resurrection, and how those things are the key to forgiveness of sin. That is what Jesus himself said. I think about the Gospels themselves. You know, if you look at them and analyze them, anywhere from a third to a half of each of the four Gospels is devoted to the last week of Jesus' life. The focus is not so much on his life, his miracles, and his teaching, wonderful as all that is; the focus is on the cross, really; his death and resurrection. Think about the Lord's Supper, the last thing that he instituted the night before his death.

BOB HEERSPINK

It was a testimony of what they needed to remember about Jesus, and it was focused on his crucifixion and hinted at his coming resurrection.

DAVE BAST

You know, the bread is broken; and he says: This is my body. The wine is poured out: This is my blood. It is not so much the life of Jesus or the teachings of Jesus that he wants us to remember. Obviously we do, but what he really wants us to focus on is his death and it's meaning for us.

BOB HEERSPINK

But now, we have been talking Paul, and you know...why Paul? Why does he have the right to authoritatively teach now about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

DAVE BAST

Yes, well, because he is one of the apostles...

BOB HEERSPINK

And why? Because he wasn't there. He wasn't in the upper room; he perhaps wasn't even present at the crucifixion. He certainly wasn't there at the open tomb.

DAVE BAST

It may be that he never even saw Jesus during the time of Jesus' earthly life. We don't know. It may be that he did; and certainly, Paul must have gotten some flack... I mean, again as we read the New Testament we have a sense that he was often criticized, and perhaps for this very reason: you are not a real apostle, Paul. You are not one of them. But this is what he says in 1 Corinthians 15. First of all, he claims the right to be an apostle because he too met the risen Christ.

⁸Last of all (Paul says) as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles; unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God; ¹⁰but by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. So I am an apostle, even though I am not a real good one; I don't deserve to be.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, he had this experience of meeting the risen Lord on the Damascus Road. He is one, as he describes it, untimely born. This was not the normal order of things. It wasn't expected.

DAVE BAST

It was after the ascension, but still it was real.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; but there it was. Paul is a witness to the resurrection, and that is a key factor in commissioning someone to be an apostle. An apostle is one who has seen the Christ.

DAVE BAST

The other thing Paul had and could claim, was a direct commission as an apostle – as a witness – by the risen Christ himself; and he talks about this as well when he recounts the story of Christ's appearance to him on the Damascus Road.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is exactly right, Dave, because when Jesus appears to Paul on the Damascus Road, he doesn't merely demonstrate to Paul that he is risen from the dead, but he has a commission to give him. He says: Rise; stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me, and to those in which I will appear to you.

DAVE BAST

So, the apostles had two things specifically that separated them from everyone else, including others who had seen Jesus...500 at one time, Paul says. First of all, they did have this encounter with him, and secondly, they were specifically commissioned to bear witness to the truth about him; and so Paul can conclude:

1 Cor.15:11 Whether it was they or I (the twelve or me, Paul) so we preach, and so you believed. They had a common message: The Apostolic Tradition.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, what was that message, and what was this apostolic truth to which they witnessed?

DAVE BAST

Well, that is exactly what we want to focus on in this program; but first, I want to invite our listeners to join us in the conversation. Really, we want *Groundwork* to be a different kind of program, where we interact with you and share your questions and your comments about the things that we are talking about. You can do that by visiting us on our website, groundworkonline.com. There, we continue to reflect on today's discussion about our world and the Bible, and many other conversations that listeners have begun about scripture and how it interacts with their lives. We would also like you to help us think about upcoming programs. One of the topics we are going to talk about is what place social justice has in our weekly gathering for worship in our church life? In your experiences, are your churches even talking about it? Share

your thoughts on that upcoming question. Finding us is easy. Just visit our website, groundworkonline.com.
Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, we have been talking about the apostolic message – what is that message? And I think a great summary is found in that 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, where Paul writes this: ¹Now, I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and in which you stand. ²By which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preach to you – unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; ⁴that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; ⁵(paraphrased)and that he made these amazing resurrection appearances.

DAVE BAST

Now, that doesn't sound very much like an independent genius who is inventing the Christian faith, does it?

BOB HEERSPINK

No; that is pretty basic.

DAVE BAST

It is true that Paul could stress his independence at times. He must have been, as I said earlier, he must have been accused often of not really being legitimate – not being one of the Twelve; and so he can stress his own authority as an apostle, and how, you know, he really got the Gospel from Christ himself, but in this passage, what he really wants to emphasize is the opposite: his agreement with the other apostles.

BOB HEERSPINK

All the other apostles are teaching the same thing. This really is the Apostolic Tradition; and I think we have to think a little bit about that word, *tradition*, because for us it is a nasty word...

DAVE BAST

It can be.

BOB HEERSPINK

It can be; it sounds like old-fashioned, human conventions. People talk about traditional worship as something that has never changed for the last two hundred years...

DAVE BAST

Boring, boring, old, dusty; right.

BOB HEERSPINK

Something that we have to get rid of; we have to get rid of traditions; that is how people understand things. My understanding is that the Apostolic Tradition – Tradition with a capital T – helps us evaluate all those little traditions by which we live out our faith.

DAVE BAST

Well, those word *tradition* literally means to hand on or to pass on; and that is what Paul is referring to in the very opening of that passage you just read: I delivered to you what I also received; that is living tradition – that is Apostolic Tradition.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

They have received it ultimately from the Lord – from the scriptures – and then they passed it on faithfully to those who came after; and so it is handed down and down and down...

BOB HEERSPINK

It is bucket brigade Christianity.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; you first receive it and then you pass it on. That is different from traditionalism. Somebody once said that tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; so as Christians we really have to get now to the core of the faith, and we have to get to that Apostolic Tradition; and first of all, says Paul, it is about facts; it is about history: Christ died, Christ was crucified, Christ was buried, Christ was risen.

DAVE BAST

And he appeared.

BOB HEERSPINK

And he appeared.

DAVE BAST

Four facts, really; but then he adds their meaning as well; and here is where I think it is really getting crucial that we understand this, that we put it all together. It is not just what happened, but what it means, and what it means especially to God that it happened, and to us.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, he says: Christ died for our sins.

DAVE BAST

Yes. Fact: Christ died. Meaning: It was for our sins according to the scriptures.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; now every death that happens in history isn't good news; in fact, there is only one death that really is good news, and that is the death of Jesus Christ. Why? Because it was for our sins. On Calvary, Christ takes upon himself our guilt that we might be forgiven and free.

DAVE BAST

In a sense, it underscores the importance of Christian doctrine or Christian teaching. Often that has gotten a bad rap, especially nowadays. It is sometimes dismissed as mere dogma; but really, you cannot be a Christian without being traditional in the sense that we have been discussing of receiving the apostolic witness, nor can you be a Christian without being dogmatic or doctrinal. Dogma is just another word for teaching – teaching the meaning of what happened. If all we know is that Christ died and Christ rose again, we are sort of: Well, so what? You know, what does that mean to me? But it is when we add the understanding that it was for our sins, and the scriptures that teach this – the rich unpacking of all that that suggests... Just think, for example, of Galatians, where it says: he became a curse for us; and that relates back to Deuteronomy, where the Law said: Cursed is everyone who hung upon a tree. Christ accepted the judgment, the penalty, the curse of sin on himself. Not because he was guilty, but for our sake. That is where we are unpacking the meaning of what happened.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, it is the meaning and the history together; that makes the Gospel. You might say it is something like Gospel mathematics; facts plus doctrine equals Gospel – equals Good News.

DAVE BAST

But there is more that we have to say, because it is not just out there, that meaning and those facts; we have to also believe – we have to internalize them. So we would add this equation, too, to Gospel mathematics: Gospel plus faith equals salvation.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; that is the second equation that really brings the Gospel home into our lives.

DAVE BAST

But how can believing a story, even if we accept its meaning, result in our salvation? That is what we need to explore a little bit further in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into the scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

We have been talking today, Bob, about the Apostle Paul, and really, the Apostolic Tradition. Paul linked himself with all the apostles, and what they taught as the Christian Gospel, they said, comes from God himself; from Jesus and from the scriptures; and this is how he introduces it in 1 Corinthians 15; that is the passage we have been working through, the first few verses:

¹Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters (Paul writes), of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, that is an interesting passage because in that verse Paul talks about two things which happened in the past, and two things which are happening in the present. He starts by talking about what happened in the past. He preached the Gospel of the cross; sounds contradictory, but that is what it is. The Gospel of Good News in the crucifixion of Jesus; that is at the core of the Apostolic Tradition; and they received it; they believed it; but that is not only what is happening, because now something more is happening right into the present.

DAVE BAST

Yes; he goes on to have two more statements about what is happening right now with respect to the Corinthians and the Gospel: In which you stand, he says. You didn't just believe it in the past – you didn't just receive it from me when I came there to Corinth – but you are still holding it...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Not perfectly, certainly, if you know anything about 1 Corinthians; but you are standing in it; and then this really interesting thing: By which you are being saved.

BOB HEERSPINK

Being saved.

DAVE BAST

In the present tense.

BOB HEERSPINK

In the present tense; you know, I think of the way Christians today talk about salvation, and they put it in the past tense...

DAVE BAST

Usually, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Are you saved?

DAVE BAST

Or, when were you saved?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; when were you saved? But that is not Paul's language. He says there is something ongoing with regard to our salvation. It is not just being saved from hell, but it is being continually saved right here and now.

DAVE BAST

There really are three tenses in which the New Testament speaks of salvation: The past certainly, yes; we have been saved from death, from hell, from the penalty of the law; we will be saved in the last day, at the resurrection; but right now we are being saved. That word, actually, for salvation is interesting. Our English word *salvation* comes from a Latin root that means health; and here Paul is thinking of that idea; we are being made well; we are being healed; salvation is also transformational in our lives here and now. It is not just simply about an event that obtained forgiveness. It is about our actually being made well from the disease of sin that afflicts us.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, Dave, as I think about all of this I think of how important the Gospel story is to our salvation. I have studied other religions of the world, and it seems the focus is on an ethical system – telling people to be healthy; telling people that they need to live a different life: you know, you are sick, shape up! But that doesn't really seem to work.

DAVE BAST

You know, if telling people to do right made a difference, we all would have been healed long ago...

BOB HEERSPINK

That's right.

DAVE BAST

One of the most significant books I think I have ever read was written in 1923 by a Presbyterian scholar named J. Gresham Machen, and the name of it is: *Christianity and Liberalism*, and there is a passage in there that so gets at this point, I think. If I could, just let me read a little bit of it. He writes: The early Christians, to the astonishment of their neighbors, lived a strange new kind of life; a life of honesty, of purity, of unselfishness (in other words, they were being saved – they were being made different); but how was the life produced? It might conceivably have been produced by exhortation. That method had often been tried in the ancient world. There were many a wandering preacher who told men how they ought to live; but such exhortation proved to be powerless. Christianity adopted an entirely different method. It transformed lives,

not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story; not by exhortation, but by the narration of an event. That was really an ah-ha moment for me.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, we are saved, not by being told to be good, but by simply being told a true story that centers in Jesus Christ; and then being asked – invited – to live into that story so that our own lives – our own stories – are woven into that of Christ’s.

DAVE BAST

This is what the Apostle Paul called the foolishness of what we preach. It does seem foolish to the world – to those who are perishing, he says in 1 Corinthians 1, but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God; and believing that story unleashes the power of God in the form of his Spirit in our lives.

BOB HEERSPINK

The story that we receive, into which we live, has the power to change us. This whole lifestyle that we really want to live, that we cannot live in and of ourselves, now becomes available to us as our lives become more and more shaped by the Spirit into the life of Jesus.

DAVE BAST

This is the Gospel – this is the Apostolic Tradition. They received it from the Lord, they passed it on to their first followers; it has been handed down, bucket by bucket, generation by generation, and it has finally come to us.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I think the question now is, what will we do with it? Are we going to be faithful in its transmission? A lot of people today are embarrassed by this story – by the Gospel. Our calling is to take this story and share it with others; whether it be in our families or with our neighbors or with the world.

DAVE BAST

Paul adds, you know, at the very end of verse 2 in 1 Corinthians 15, a couple of qualifying statements. He says: you are being saved by this as long as you hold fast to it.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Unless you believed in vain. Now, I don’t think it is possible to believe in vain. I think the Lord will be faithful to those who believe, but it is possible not to hold fast to it. We need to hang on to the Gospel; not in the sense of keeping it to ourselves, though; but in the sense of being true to it, and then passing it on to the next generation as well.

BOB HEERSPINK

We strengthen the Gospel in our own lives as we give it away.

Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and don’t forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life.

DAVE BAST

So tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Just visit us online at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-salvation-process>

Printed on November 23, 2024

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