

- I. I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
  - A. I Peter 4:17-19 . . . For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? [18] And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? [19] Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.
  - B. Pray
- II. What is difficult about salvation?
  - A. I Peter 4:18 . . . And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?
  - B. Peter's statement about salvation being difficult is very interesting, especially in light of the popular theologies of our day.
    1. According to Reformed theology (Calvinism), there is no difficulty on our part, for salvation is all our sovereign God's doing, and we simply respond accordingly to His electing and saving us.
    2. According to the Free-will theologies that also hold to the current eternal security teaching, and according to some of the popular forms of evangelism today, getting saved is fairly easy.
    3. Bill Bright's "The Four Spiritual Laws" are a good example of the ease with which the lost are saved – as affirmed by the fourth law, which says: "We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives" (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:1-8; Revelation 3:20).
    4. After The Four Laws, the next most used evangelistic tool is probably the Romans Road. And the ease with which we are saved is summed up by its use of Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."
    5. Finally, the Wordless Book has been used for many years as a means to lead children to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, its message is simple and it presents salvation as easily obtained by faith.
  - C. From Reformed Theology to these three evangelism examples, it appears that the general thinking among Christians in our day is that getting saved is fairly easy – which brings us back to Peter's words about it being

with difficulty that the righteous is saved. However, what I want to do is to look at Peter's words from a different direction than most modern theologians, commentaries, and teachers have done.

1. Let's begin by examining the source of Peter's words, for they are nearly a direct quote from Proverbs 11:31 as found in the Septuagint, which says, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"
  2. The Septuagint is one of several early Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament. Its name is taken from the Latin word for seventy, and is in reference to the supposedly seventy Jewish scholars who translated the OT Hebrew Bible into Greek. It was completed around 2 BC, and it is believed to have become popular among Christians as the church spread toward Egypt, N. Africa, Rome, and Greece. Its use is affirmed by the fact that it was the primary source of OT quotes by Paul, Peter, and the early church writers.
    - a. We are not likely to be familiar with the Septuagint's version of Proverbs 11:31 because the Bible translations we are likely to use depend on the Hebrew, rather than the Greek OT scriptures.
    - b. Therefore, the NASB translation of Proverbs 11:31 is different from the Septuagint. The NASB says: "If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!"
    - c. However, we believe the Holy Spirit was directing Peter's mind and pen as he wrote this letter, which means the Septuagint translation is God's choice, and we are wise to treat it as such.
  3. Which brings us back to considering what Peter was talking about when he said: "it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved."
- D. However, before looking at what Peter is trying to tell us about the difficulties of salvation, I want to make a few preparatory statements.
1. First, neither Peter nor I are ignoring or negating the fact that only the Perfect Lamb of God could, and did, pay the penalty for our sin.
    - a. You and I can only satisfy that penalty by spending eternity in hell.
    - b. So whatever scriptures we look at concerning the difficulty of salvation, be it eternal salvation or some other kind of salvation, they in no way negate the necessity of Jesus dying on our behalf, for without Jesus, we are lost, now and forever!
  2. Second, the common teaching in the church today is that salvation is personally costly to God, but freely given to us – without cost or

requirement other than believing in Christ's death and resurrection as God's saving work on our behalf.

- a. In my opinion, this view of the costs of salvation is lop-sided, and it gets in the way of discovering the meaning of I Peter 4:18 and other such scriptures.
  - b. Therefore, I urge you to at least open yourself up to consider a broader understanding of this verse and other scriptures that do not fit within the common teaching about salvation's cost.
3. And finally, in the past 75 years or so, another common teaching about salvation is that it takes place in a moment of time and lasts throughout eternity. Though there is scriptural truth to this teaching, and though this truth is strongly supported by current theology, it is not the complete truth found in the scriptures. The scriptures use the word "saved" or "salvation" in three primary ways.
- a. First, eternal salvation is spoken of as a single past event with future consequences. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
  - b. Second, eternal salvation is spoken of as an ongoing process. (I Corinthians 1:18)
  - c. Third, eternal salvation is spoken of as a future event which God will bestow upon His people. (Matthew 10:22)
  - d. In Peter's first letter, he refers to salvation five times. Four times he speaks of salvation as a future event – that is, something that will come to us in the future (I Peter 1:5, 9-10; 2:2; 4:18). The other reference to salvation is found in I Peter 3:21, and it refers to a current or past event (*baptism now saves you*).
  - e. My point here is that the Bible speaks of eternal salvation as a past event, as an ongoing process, and as a future event. If we believe salvation is only a past event, then we have no way of understanding what Peter is saying. But if we take the whole of scripture and consider that Peter is talking about salvation in one or more of its three forms, than we can begin to discern what he is talking about.

E. What the scripture says about the difficult part of salvation

1. There are a number of NT scriptures that speak to the difficulty of being saved, – beginning with the first step of repentance and faith in Christ's saving work all the way to crossing the threshold of God's eternal kingdom to live with God forever. I have assembled some of them for your consideration today.

2. Scriptures dealing with the difficulty related to the initial steps of eternal salvation.
  - a. Luke 13:23-28 . . . And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, [24] "Strive (agonize) to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. [25] Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' [26] Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; [27] and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.' [28] In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. (Note Matthew 7:13-14)
  - b. Mark 10:23-25 . . . And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" [24] The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! [25] It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
  - c. An overview of scripture indicates that in most cases, only a few are being saved – which lends credibility to Peter's words that salvation is difficult rather than easy. Consider:
    - (1) Luke 13:24 . . . Strive (agonize) to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.
    - (2) Matthew 7:22-23 . . . Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' [23] And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'
    - (3) I Peter 3:18-20 . . . For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; [19] in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, [20] who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah,

during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

3. Scriptures dealing with the difficulty of eternal salvation as an ongoing process.
  - a. Matthew 10:37-38 . . . He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. [38] And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (Luke 14:26-27)
  - b. Matthew 16:24-25 . . . Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. [25] "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.
  - c. Acts 14:21-22 . . . After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, [22] strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
  - d. Hebrews 12:7, 11 . . . It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? [11] All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.
  - e. I Peter 4:1-2 . . . Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.
4. Scripture dealing with the difficulty of eternal salvation as a future event which we are looking forward to.
  - a. Matthew 24:9-13 . . . Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. [10] "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. [11] "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. [12] "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. [13] "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.
  - b. II Peter 2:20-21 . . . For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome,

the last state has become worse for them than the first. [21] For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

5. Does any of these scriptures mean that salvation is by works and not by grace? Absolutely not! But what these scriptures do show is that there is a difficult and demanding aspect to eternal salvation.
  6. And why is this important to us?
    - a. Because the supposed easy path to salvation may make you feel eternally secure, but it is not a reliable path to eternal life with God.
    - b. Christian mediocrity or prolonged spiritual immaturity or living so much like the world that they can barely tell the difference between us and them, may be common today and excused on the basis of the currently popular teaching on God's grace, but the scriptures never present these things as the way of saving faith.
  7. The reality is, to not sow to our flesh but rather to fight it and subdue it, and to not practice sin, and to die to self, and to deny self, and to put off our old nature and put on Christ-likeness, and to resist the devil – not once but over and over again, and to guard our mind so that we continue to think on God and the things of God, and to feed meekness and humility, and put on a heart of compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience, and to pursue a pure heart and intimate fellowship with God, and to persevere in doing these things takes work. Indeed, it takes hard work – day after day and year after year, because working out our salvation is difficult.
  8. But this difficult part is not the end of the story, Peter goes on to say.
- F. I Peter 4:19 . . . Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.
1. Yes, past, present, and getting all the way to future salvation may be difficult and involve much suffering, but we are not trapped in the difficulties or sufferings. As Peter points out, we can entrust our souls to God, which means, we can place our souls in God's hands for safe keeping.
  2. Jesus did this on the cross when He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit (entrust) my spirit" (Luke 23:46).
  3. Jude speaks of doing this when he says, "Now unto Him who is able, to keep you from falling, and to make you stand in His presence, blameless and with great joy . . ." (Jude 24-25).

4. And Paul affirms God's trustworthiness in bringing us home when he says, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. [29] For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:28-29).
5. Now according to the scripture, we must do our part – as difficult as it may be, yet we can count on God to faithfully do His, as so clearly stated in Philippians 2:12-13, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling; [13] for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Is salvation difficult? Yes. Must we do our part in facing and overcoming the difficulties? Yes. Is doing our part enough? No, for there is no salvation, past, present, or future, apart from God's greater and far more important part. Can we depend on God to do His part? Yes – from beginning to end!