

To “be saved” or not to “be saved”? The question for Alf McCreary.

Not for the first time as a journalist, the Religion Correspondent of the Belfast Telegraph, Alf McCreary, has written with a fair measure of contempt for God’s people, who rejoice to declare that through Christ alone they have “**been saved**”. Such a narrow view of who constitutes a real Christian, namely only those who have “**been saved**” is a stench in the nostrils of Alf McCreary.

In his weekly column for Saturday 22nd August 2009 he was commenting upon the recent appointment of a new Chief Constable of the PSNI [Police Service of Northern Ireland]. The new Chief Constable will be **Matt Baggott**, described in Mr McCreary’s article as ‘**a committed Christian and President of the Christian Police Association as well as Vice-President of the National Association of Police Chaplains**’.

Towards the end of his article Mr McCreary wrote the following – ‘**Matt Baggott will also find that our religion can be divisive, not only in the community sense where the term “Protestant” and “Catholic” are used as divisive labels, but also in the theological sense as well. There is a great division between those who regard themselves as “saved” and others who they believe to be “unsaved” and in need of salvation. This intolerance runs contrary to the wideness of the spiritual embrace as outlined by the original Head of all the Churches**’.

As mentioned in previous articles about Mr McCreary, he is an ordained elder of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland and so publicly he would have professed The Bible and The Westminster Confession of Faith to be his ‘supreme’ and ‘subordinate standards of faith’ respectively.

Briefly at the outset I would first like to quote some portions from The Westminster Confession of Faith that Mr McCreary would have ‘signed up to’ before turning then to God’s infallible Word, The Bible.

In Chapter IX, paragraph III we read ‘**Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation**’

In Chapter X, paragraph 1 we read ‘**All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, and in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God**’.

Finally in Chapter XIV, paragraph 1 we read ‘**The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word**’.

From these few brief quotations, and I could have cited others, it is clear that The Westminster Confession of Faith identifies true Christians as those who have “**been saved**” – this is a Confession that Mr McCreary publicly, before God, ‘signed up to’ and shamefully since then he has proceeded to regularly ‘shred’ it in his column. A much wiser man than Alf McCreary wrote “**When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools. Pay that which thou hast vowed.**

Better it is that thou shouldest not vow, than thou shouldest vow and not pay” [Ecclesiastes 5:4-5].

Commenting on these verses in his Study Bible, Pastor John MacArthur wrote **‘Promises made to God have serious implications. The Old Testament background for this admonition is found in Deuteronomy 23:21-23 “When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not be slack to pay it; for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee, and it would be sin in thee... That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform... according as thou hast vowed unto the Lord thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth”. In Acts 5:1-11 Ananias and Sapphira learned the hard way’.**

Whilst these verses perhaps focus more on vows relating to giving to God in the practical and material realms, I believe there is a principal enshrined where any vow made to God is concerned, and indeed in the realm of spiritual matters, I believe the onus is all the greater on the one making such a vow to faithfully fulfil it. In the Sermon on The Mount, in the portion on ‘perjury’ before God, recorded in **Matthew 5:33-37** the Lord says this **“let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay”** and in **James 5:12** we read **“let your yea be yea and your nay, nay”**.

Clearly Mr McCreary is comfortable to regularly make a mockery of his ordination vows by the foolish and indeed embarrassing things that he writes in his column, but one day, there will be a price to pay, for God’s Word states plainly **“Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man soweth that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” [Galatians 6:7-8].** Theodore Epp, the then Director of the Back To The Bible Broadcast wrote in his study on Galatians (p 169) **‘One thing we must ever remember and that is the harvest is sure. Sowing and reaping are inseparably linked together... If we do not sow to the spiritual now, we will not reap to the spiritual in the end’.**

Christians should be people who keep their word (and also God’s Word) – they should not be **“double-minded”** for such are **“unstable in all *their* ways”** according to **James 1:8.** John MacArthur comments **‘This (double-minded) man is a hypocrite... the use of this expression in 4:8 makes it clear that it refers to an unbeliever’.** Alf McCreary, not only in this article, but in countless other articles, has demonstrated that he is a **“double-minded man”** – one whose word and opinions on spiritual matters are not to be trusted as they regularly run contrary to the Word of God that he has publicly vowed to respect and obey.

Moving now to The Bible, declared publicly by Mr McCreary to be his ‘supreme standard of faith’, we find many references to the experience of people having **“been saved”**. Commenting on **‘save’** and **‘salvation’** Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words lists a number of instances where these words/expressions occur and also in what context – several of these, very relevant to the subject matter of this article, are as follows on page 547 under **‘Save; Saving’** –

‘Sozo’ “to save” is used (as with the noun *soteria*, “salvation”) of...

(b) the spiritual and eternal salvation granted immediately by God to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, e.g. Acts 2:47 “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should [were being] saved” [Cecil – please note that Christians who constitute “the church” must first ‘be saved’] Acts 16:31 “And they [Paul and Silas] said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”... Ephesians 2:5 “Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath made us alive together with Christ (by grace ye

are saved) 2nd Timothy 1:9 “[God] who hath **saved** us and called us” Titus 3:5 “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he [God] **saved us**”... of

(c) the present experience of God’s power to deliver from the bondage of sin, e.g. Matthew 1:21 “thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall **save** his people from their sins” Romans 5:10 “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall **be saved** by his life” 1st Corinthians 15:1-2 “Moreover brethren I declare unto you the gospel... by which also ye **are saved**” Hebrews 7:25 “Wherefore he [Christ] is able also to **save them** to the uttermost that come unto God by him” [Cecil – please note that if someone wants to ‘come unto God’ as a Christian they must first ‘**be saved**’]... of

(d) the future deliverance of believers at the second coming of Christ for His saints... Romans 5:9 “being now justified by his blood, we [those destined for glory – see Romans 8:30] shall **be saved** from wrath through him”.

These three aspects of ‘**being saved/salvation**’ are therefore a past experience known as ‘**justification**’ [the penalty for sin removed] a present experience known as ‘**sanctification**’ [the power of sin being broken] and a future experience ‘**glorified**’ [the presence of sin removed].

Back in 2003 I wrote an article called ‘**Catholic but not Christian**’ – it was a response to an article by a Roman Catholic priest [Patrick McCafferty] in which he had referred to ‘**being saved/salvation**’. I dealt specifically with the three aspects just mentioned and I want to include here some of what I wrote then as it has equal application in this case. I wrote –

When a Christian speaks of ‘**having been saved**’ he is referring to the great doctrine of **JUSTIFICATION**, which is full acquittal from all penalty due to sin. When an ungodly sinner is truly ‘**born again**’ and becomes a Christian, part of God’s gracious and great gift of salvation is a perfect and permanent **JUSTIFICATION**. The Christian no longer stands condemned because of sin. God “**hath delivered us [him] from the power of darkness and hath translated us [him] into the kingdom of his dear Son**” [Colossians 1:13]. The result is that a Christian is now no longer “**in Adam**” [‘condemned’] but is now wonderfully and graciously and permanently “**in Christ**” [‘justified’] [1 Corinthians 15:22]. God’s Word says to Christians “**There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus**” [Romans 8:1]. God Himself reveals to Christians, at their conversion, that they “**have everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation but are passed from death unto life**” [John 5:24]. When a Christian speaks of ‘**having been saved**’ he has in mind being saved forever from the **PENALTY** of sin because of what Christ alone accomplished for him.

What then does a Christian have in mind when he goes on to say that he ‘**is being saved**’? He is referring to the doctrine of **PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**. Having ‘**justified**’ an ungodly sinner, delivering him from the **PENALTY** of sin, God, by the work and influence of His gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, begins to deliver the Christian from the **POWER** of sin. This is well summed up by this line from Charles Wesley’s great hymn ‘*O for a thousand tongues*’: Wesley wrote - ‘*He [God] breaks the power of cancelled sin*’. Paul, in his letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, told them “**For this is the will of God, even your sanctification!** [1 Thessalonians 4:3]. Christians who sin are robbed of “**the joy**” of their salvation but they do not lose their ‘**justification**’. When David sinned grievously he implored God to “**Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation**” [Psalm 51:12] – David did not plead for a restoration of his salvation [his ‘**justification**’].

For Christians *'I have been saved'* means having been **PERMANENTLY JUSTIFIED** from the **PENALTY** of sin and *'I am being saved'* means being **PROGRESSIVELY SANCTIFIED** from the **POWER** of sin.

Finally, what then do Christians mean when they say *'I will be saved'*? Here they have in view the sure prospect of **'GLORIFICATION'** when they will be saved from the **PRESENCE** of sin. This looks to the eternal age to come when Christians, the redeemed of the Lord, will receive their resurrection bodies [**"it is raised in glory"** 1 Corinthians 15:42] and will assuredly be, as another hymn writer [James Montgomery] wrote, *'For ever with the Lord'* [based on 1 Thessalonians 4:17].

'I have been saved' - **PERMANENTLY JUSTIFIED** from the **PENALTY** of sin. *'I am being saved'* - **PROGRESSIVELY SANCTIFIED** from the **POWER** of sin and *'I will be saved'* – **ETERNALLY GLORIFIED** and kept from the **PRESENCE** of sin.

The progression of Christians from **JUSTIFIED** to **GLORIFIED** is assured by the work of Christ on the cross for Paul wrote in **Romans 8:30** **"Moreover, whom he [God] did predestinate them he also called and whom he called them he also justified and whom he justified them he also glorified"**.

Scripture is quite clear – all people born since the time of Adam and Eve have entered this world under God's condemnation upon sin and they need to **'be saved'** and to receive His gracious **'salvation'** from His just condemnation.

Those who depart this world without having **'been saved'**, and not possessing God's gracious gift of **'salvation'**, are destined for an eternity in hell – that biblical truth will not sit comfortably with Alf McCreary and, unless God enlightens him to its reality, I am truly fearful for his eternal well-being.

The Lord Jesus Christ outlined His mission in coming to this world – He said, **"the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost"** [Matthew 18:11] and **"the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them"** [Luke 9:56].

Matthew Henry, commenting on the verse in Matthew 18, wrote **'Christ came into the world to save souls, and he will reckon severely with those [like misguided journalists?] who hinder the progress of others who are setting their faces heavenward'**.

The Apostle Paul wrote in **1st Timothy 1:15** **"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance [even by misguided journalists] that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"**.

To God's **'saved'** people the message of scripture is so clear, but we must always remember that it is only clear because we are no longer **unsaved** and unregenerate – we have been graciously **'saved'** and have received God's gift of Himself, His indwelling Spirit, who enlightens us to the truths of the Bible for **"the natural [unsaved] man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual [saved] judgeth all things"** [1st Corinthians 2:14-15].

May God have mercy upon such a one as Alf McCreary, who proclaims that those who preach **'salvation'** by **"the narrow gate"** and who warn of impending **"destruction"** for those trusting in and travelling along **"the broad way"** are guilty of **'intolerance'**. The One he referred to as **'the original Head of all the Churches'** narrowed down the way to heaven when He declared in **John 14:6** **"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me"** – you can't get much more **'narrow'**

than that. This same **'original Head of all the Churches'** said earlier in **John 10:9** **"I am the door; BY ME if any man enter in he shall be saved"**.

Alf McCreary is clearly, as he himself wrote, **'in need of salvation'**. I pray he may be moved to earnestly seek it while the Lord may be found [see Isaiah 55:6].

Cecil Andrews – 'Take Heed' Ministries – 27th August 2009