

STRIVING TO SAVE SOME

Mac Deaver

The salvation of the human soul is a most delicate matter. It is a most personal matter. It is a most individual matter. It is the most important matter. God wrote the Bible in order that souls might be saved. God established the church so that souls might be saved. God has demonstrated his power and goodness in the creation of this universe in order that souls might be saved. And yet, we are by the divine record informed that very few people will ever reach heaven (Matt. 7:13, 14; Matt. 22:14). What then is the best that can be done? If God himself cannot save all men, then we can do no better. We can, however, save some.

I Corinthians 9:22. Paul did not volunteer to be a preacher. He did not even at first plan on being a Christian. His miraculous encounter with the ascended Christ changed his mind, however (Acts 9:1ff; Acts 22:1-21). He became a Christian, a preacher, a teacher, and an apostle (Acts 26:28, 29; I Tim.2:7; II Tim. 1:11). He labored extensively and more abundantly than any other apostle (I Cor. 15:10). But even his lasting longing for his Jewish kinfolk and his concern for the Gentiles to whom he was partially sent could not move some men. He adopted a policy of adaptation. In areas of human judgment, he bent. He catered to the spiritual needs of men by the utilization of means or methods with which his hopeful converts might identify. He says that he brought himself under bondage to all that he might gain the more (I Cor. 9:19). He explains by saying that to Jews he became as a Jew. To the Gentiles he became as one without law. To the weak he became weak. "I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (v. 22). So, in matters of judgment, we are authorized by the example of the apostle Paul to do whatever is most expedient in order to appeal to the souls men. We cannot sin in an effort to save, but we can adapt our means or methods to the approval of a given culture. We must do what we can before all in order to save some.

Romans 11:14. In Romans 11 Paul discusses the marvelous providence of God as God used the Jews in order to get the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul claims to be "an apostle of Gentiles" (v. 13). Elsewhere we learn that he was to preach to the children of Israel and Gentiles (Acts 9:15) and that he had been "intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision" (Gal. 2:7, 8). God had the gospel preached to Jews first, and after a while it went to the Gentiles (Acts 2, 10). God was hopeful that the coming in of the Gentiles would provoke Jews to jealousy and thence eventually lead to more Jewish conversion (vs. 11, 12). So, Paul tells us that he was an apostle of Gentiles and that he glorified his ministry (v. 13) "if by any means I may provoke to jealousy them that are my flesh, and may save some of them" (v. 14). Earlier in chapter 10, he had bemoaned the sad fact that, generally speaking, the Jews as a nation had rejected the gospel. While Paul longed for their salvation, he testified to the fact that they had ignorant zeal and refused to subject themselves to God's plan for their righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3). Paul well knew the resisting force of Jewish ignorance. He himself had earlier persecuted the church "ignorantly in unbelief" (I Tim. 1:13). He finally obeyed the gospel himself, but so very many of his fellow Jews chose to remain, they thought, with Moses who had earlier written of the coming Christ (Jno. 5:39, 40, 46, 47; 9:28). Only some could be reached. In each town to which Paul came on his evangelistic trips, if there was a Jewish synagogue present, he would go there and preach to the Jews first before

attempting to reach the Gentile people (cf. Acts 13:44-48).

Jude 22, 23. Near the end of his short letter Jude wrote, “And on some have mercy, who are in doubt; and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” We are to gently and patiently assist doubters to see the truth of the gospel. Perhaps some may be actually reached with the gospel. Perhaps they can be pulled, snatched, or seized from the fire. Others may be taught, but in teaching them, brethren must be careful lest they instead of converting the sinners to the truth be converted away from the truth to sin and error. But notice that with regard to those to be helped by the church, Jude uses the word “some.” On some have mercy, some save, on some have mercy with fear. Of course God wants all men saved (11 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4), and the aim of the gospel is to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (11 Cor. 10:5). Yet, we are informed of the fact that only some can be reached (cf. Matt. 13:18-23).