

Salvation

The New Birth

Bible Doctrine Series

God extends the offer of salvation and eternal life in Heaven to every individual. Each person must choose whether or not he will accept God's offer.

What is salvation?

Salvation is the act of God's grace by which man receives forgiveness for his sins and stands before God as though he had never committed them. This experience is made possible by the death of Jesus Christ, God's Son, on the Cross. In fact, the word *salvation* comes from the Greek word meaning "redeemer" or "saviour." When Christ was born, the angels proclaimed, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour" (Luke 2:11). Christ's sole purpose in coming to earth was to bring salvation to the human family through His sacrificial death.

In a letter to believers at Corinth, Paul the Apostle makes it clear that Christ's death for the salvation of humanity is the very foundation of the Gospel message. "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Why is salvation necessary?

In the beginning of time, God created the first man and woman on earth, Adam and Eve. They enjoyed perfect fellowship with God, walking and talking with Him, and living pure and joyful lives in a beautiful garden that supplied all of their needs. God created Adam and Eve as free moral agents—they had the ability and liberty to choose whether or not to obey Him. His only rule for them was that they were not to eat the fruit of a certain tree: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In spite of knowing there was a penalty for disobedience (Genesis 2:17), they chose to ignore God's warning and to eat from the forbidden tree. Through this act of deliberate rebellion against God, sin entered into their hearts. Since God can have nothing to do with sin, their sin separated them from Him. Theologians call this initial disobedience in the Garden, "The Fall of Man."

The descendants of Adam and Eve—every person born into this world—inherited the sinful nature of their ancestors. Instead of coming into the world desiring to do right, each individual is born with a natural inclination toward evil. We read in Romans 3:23 that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Sin is not simply a catalog of committed transgressions, but a condition out of which individual acts of wrongdoing are generated.

Sin may be obvious or subtle, but it always separates from God. The prophet Isaiah indicated this in Isaiah 59:2, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." The ultimate result of sin is death and separation from God for eternity. Since all people in their natural state are sinners, all people are doomed to eternal death. However, God in His mercy and infinite goodness provided salvation

through Jesus Christ as a way for humanity to escape sin's awful consequences and to be united with God in loving communion.

God's plan for man's salvation

Sin and guilt are inseparable, so the sinner stands guilty and condemned before God. God's perfect righteousness and absolute justice demands a penalty be paid for sin. According to Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death"—physical death, spiritual death (separation from God), and eternal death (eternal separation from God with no hope of ever experiencing His saving grace).

God's plan from the "foundation of the world" (Hebrews 9:26) was to send His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty of sin. Only a perfect and guiltless person could satisfy the justice of God in making payment for humanity's sins. Because Christ was sinless, He could "taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9), and pay the atoning price for their sins. In His amazing love and compassion for us, Christ willingly gave His life on the Cross of Calvary, suffering its cruel, agonizing death so that we could be saved from sin and its consequences. He died in our place that we might have forgiveness for sins through His shed Blood. When a repentant sinner comes to God and by faith confesses his belief that Jesus is the Son of God who died for all mankind, he will experience salvation.

Three days after Christ's sacrificial death, He arose from the grave and walked on earth once more! That amazing fact was documented by hundreds of people who saw Jesus after His Resurrection. Now, He lives in Heaven with God.

Terminology relating to salvation

There are many terms used in Scripture that refer to the same work of grace.

Justification — To be justified is to be judicially pardoned by God and thus absolved from the penalty of sin. Justification, the opposite of condemnation, occurs when God cancels the guilt and forgives the transgressions of a sinner. We read in Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." God looks upon the sacrifice Jesus made on Calvary, and accepts that sacrifice as a substitute for the repentant sinner paying his own penalty. For Christ's sake, God forgives the sinner, blots out his transgressions, and in so doing, justifies him.

Saved/Salvation — In Acts 16:30, we read that the Philippian jailer fell before Paul and Silas and inquired in desperation, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The word *saved* comes from a Greek word meaning "delivered" or "made whole." The angel of the Lord who appeared to Joseph told him that Mary would bring forth a Child conceived by the Holy Ghost, and declared, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Conversion — Jesus used the word *converted* when He instructed His disciples, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). To be *converted* means "to be changed from one purpose or use to another." As an example, a current trend in areas where housing is at a premium is to convert buildings that were once industrial buildings or warehouses into apartments. The inside is completely changed; only the outer dimensions of the structure remain the same. That building has been converted—changed completely—from one purpose to another. When a person is converted, he is changed completely by the power of God.

Atonement — In Romans 5:11, we read, "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." The word *atonement* means "exchange; restoration to divine favor." It refers to the reconciliation between God and humanity, accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The same word is translated *reconciliation* in most places in the New Testament. The only way a person can be saved is through faith in the atoning work of Christ on Calvary.

Reconciliation — Sin corrupted the moral nature of humanity, and thus the original state of every person born into this world is rebellion against his Creator. Reconciliation needs to take place—agreement and harmony must be restored—but a person cannot approach God in a sinful

condition. Repairing the breach can only occur through a mediator, and that mediator is Jesus Christ. We read in Colossians 1:19-22, “For it pleased the Father that in him [Jesus] should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; . . . And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.” Through the provision of Christ’s shed Blood, harmony is secured between the repentant sinner and God, and they are brought together in fellowship and love.

Regeneration/Born again/New birth — The word *regeneration* literally means “to be born again,” and refers to the spiritual change that takes place in a person when he comes into possession of new life in Christ. Jesus told a ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Nicodemus did not understand this statement, and he asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:4-7). The phrase *born again* means “born from above.” Jesus, using the universally familiar example of physical birth, was teaching the necessity of spiritual rebirth.

Redeemed/Redemption — The word *redeem* means “to ransom; to buy back.” Peter wrote to believers in the Early Church, reminding them, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19). The price was paid for a sinner’s redemption by Christ’s death on Calvary.

Who may receive salvation?

The grace of God is freely and generously offered to all, for Jesus shed His Blood that all might be redeemed. No one is held under the bondage of sin and condemnation and forced to serve Satan without the opportunity of becoming a child of God. Everyone has been given the power of choice. Whatever the condition of an individual, Jesus is able and eager to save him. He said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Those who open their hearts to God have this promise: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). In Revelation 22:17, the universal invitation is repeated, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” God’s appeal extends to all people in every generation, but the individual must make a personal choice to avail himself of salvation.

How to receive salvation

The steps for receiving salvation are laid out in God’s Word—the Bible. The moment an individual takes these steps honestly and sincerely, God will pardon him and assure him that he has been born again to new life in Christ.

Acknowledge the need. The first step toward receiving forgiveness is realizing the need for it. The Bible says that all have sinned. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). When a person recognizes the fact that he is a sinner and doomed to Hell unless he is completely changed by God’s mercy, his self-righteousness and self-sufficiency will disappear. He will rightly see himself as being in a perilous condition, in desperate need of God’s intervention to save him from eternal damnation.

Repent and confess. When a sinner comes to God with genuine sorrow in his heart for committed sins and confesses them, asking God to forgive him, God will not turn him away. God’s Word promises, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). It also says, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Repentance does not earn God’s forgiveness, but rather, it places the sinner in a position where it can be received. It is the condition of the human heart required by God before forgiveness can be granted. We read in

2 Corinthians 7:10, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

Forsake all known sin. A person who is truly repentant will be willing to turn away from the sins of his past and to purpose never to go back to them. Isaiah 55:7 reads, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him . . . for he will abundantly pardon.” As one turns from sin and his own ways, God’s pardon is offered in abundance!

Ask. The repentant sinner must invite Jesus Christ into his heart and life, yielding control of his life in complete honesty and surrender to Him. Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

Believe. When a sinner has reached out to God for mercy and forgiveness, the gap between him and the Savior must be spanned by faith. Receiving is conditional upon the individual’s faith in Christ’s atonement. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” When a repentant sinner looks to Christ’s atoning work at Calvary, faith takes hold and he receives salvation through the redeeming power of Christ.

The assurance of salvation

God will let a person know when he has been saved. The Bible tells us, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16). Joy and peace will replace all feelings of guilt, emptiness, and heartache. The sense of condemnation will be gone in a moment of time. In its place will be a deep love for God and a desire to please Him.

What salvation accomplishes

When a person is converted, he stands before God as though he had never sinned. His sins are forgiven and removed from him as “far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12), and cast “into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19), never to be remembered against him again. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” The newborn believer’s outlook and life style change. The wrong things that were once loved are now hated; the right things that were once hated are now loved. Not only do actions change, but even motives and desires are transformed. When salvation takes place, the sense of separation and inner emptiness vanishes. Salvation causes the individual to feel complete, loved, and at peace. He will have love for God and for other people.

How to keep salvation

Some simple actions will help new believers keep what God has given them.

Purpose to continue to live for God. A new Christian needs to make a commitment to cherish his connection with God and value it above all else. While it is possible to turn away and become separated from God again, that is not necessary. God will help the one who determines to retain his salvation at any cost. If a person walks within the framework of God’s Word, he will be kept by the power of God.

Make restitution. After receiving salvation, the newborn believer must make right any wrongs that have been committed against others in order to have a clear conscience before God and other people. God expects His followers to straighten out the past wherever possible. Paul the Apostle said, “Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16).

Read the Bible. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” To *rightly divide* the Word of truth means “to properly proportion it; to attach the right weight to it.” Believers must value the Word of God, building their lives on His Word and building His Word into their lives, for it enlightens, encourages, and points out areas of danger.

Talk to God. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we find the instruction, “Pray without ceasing.” We cannot spend every moment on our knees, but it is possible to have a prayerful attitude at all times. This attitude is built by acknowledging our dependence upon God, realizing His presence within, and determining to obey Him fully. The person who does this will find it natural to pray frequent, spontaneous prayers in addition to regular times of sustained communion with Him.

Seek for entire sanctification. If a person genuinely wishes to stay saved, the best course of action is to seek immediately for entire sanctification. Salvation deals with the acts and guilt of committed sins, but the sinful nature—the inward tendency inherited from Adam—still remains. Entire sanctification deals with the nature of sin. John addressed the two-fold sin problem and offered the two-fold remedy in 1 John 1:7-9, saying, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin [*singular, the sin nature*]. If we say that we have no sin [*if we say we were not born with an Adamic or sin nature*], we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, [*plural, committed sins*] he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins [*salvation*], and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [*sanctification*].” Forgiveness is offered for actual committed sins, while cleansing is offered for the Adamic nature. “The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Fellowship with other Christians. Friendships should be developed with other like-minded believers. Spending time with those who have committed their lives to God, both on an informal basis and in the more organized setting of collective worship, is a great source of spiritual strength and encouragement. Hebrews 10:24-25 warns against forsaking the assembling together with other Christians. When believers gather together to worship, they receive help and encouragement from other believers.

Learn to recognize a trial. The Apostle Peter cautioned believers in the Early Church not to think it was strange when a fiery trial came along to try them, as though some strange thing happened to them (1 Peter 4:12). He let them know that trials were not abnormal, but are within the plan of God. God allows the faith of a Christian to be tested to strengthen and encourage growth.

Distinguish between temptation and sin. It is vital for new Christians to distinguish between a temptation to do wrong and an act of sin. Temptation is not sin. Rebelling against God’s command and resuming evil is sin.

Tell others. It is important that newborn Christians tell their close associates about the change that God has made in their lives. In Revelation 12:11, we read that those who triumphed over Satan “overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.”

Be sensitive to the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is the Guide and Teacher of the believer. We read in Romans 8: 14, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” It is vitally important to heed the warnings and counsel of the Holy Spirit to our hearts.

Living victoriously

One of the results of salvation is that a victorious life without sin is made possible. We read in 1 John 3:9-10, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” The nature of God and the nature of sin are never blended together; they are so radically different that it is impossible to make a composite of the two.

A follower of Christ must continue to walk in obedience to the light of God’s Word in order to retain his salvation. If he does not, that light becomes darkness—and how great is that darkness! The only way for a newborn Christian to retain his freedom from spiritual death is by continuing to abhor and reject all known sin.

As long as the believer is in a mortal body, he will suffer from human frailties and limitations. Saved and sanctified individuals continue to face physical, mental, and even emotional limitations that were a result of the Fall. He may make mistakes and may face chastening from God; he may

need to come before God and express sorrow for grieving the heart of God. However, if the motivating and underlying theme of his life is to love the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength (Luke 10:27), the grace and power of God are sufficient to keep that one pure and free from sin. In Jude 24 we read that He “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.” Paul wrote to Timothy, “For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). God will keep the person who wants to be kept. Just as the vital union with the Lord Jesus broke the power of sin in our hearts and nature, continuing in unity with Him prevents sin in our lives.

A clear message

New life in Christ is possible for every person. The reality of the new birth has been proved by countless numbers of people who have experienced God’s pardon and experienced a complete transformation in their lives.

The Bible is clear: all who have not been born again need to repent and look to God for salvation. The urgency of this message cannot be overstated, for the consequences are eternal! While eternal loss awaits those who refuse, eternal joy and happiness will be the reward to those who receive and retain this wonderful experience of salvation.