

THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16-17.

OUR NEED OF SALVATION

The Holiness and Righteousness of God and the Sinfulness of Man

Before the fall sin had not entered the world, and man had communion with God. But when Satan enticed Adam to disobey God’s direct command, and to obey him instead, sin became part of man, and he lost his communion with God.

The Scriptures enable us to realize the huge gulf separating the righteousness and holiness of Almighty God, and the sinful corruption of mankind. Referring to God, the apostle John says,

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” 1 John 1:5.

God is enthroned in such an unapproachable aura of light and purity that man, in his unredeemed state, cannot have communion with Him.

He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power.” 1 Tim 6:15-16.

Unredeemed man is a sinner, separated from God by his sin nature. There is no exception. All have sinned and lost man’s original righteousness he had before the fall.

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” Romans 3:23.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” 1 John 1:8-10.

GOD’S PLAN FOR OUR REDEMPTION AND RECONCILIATION TO HIMSELF

As God is a God of justice and righteousness, He could not ignore sin. It had to be subjected to His righteous judgment and punishment. He knew that man could never attain to His purity and holiness by his own efforts, so He undertook a work of grace whereby their righteousness was acquired by a substitute acting on their behalf.

He sent forth His own Son Jesus Christ, to live amongst us as a man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary, who was a virgin. He grew up amongst us, revealing the nature of God to us by His sinless life, His love and compassion, and His miraculous ministries of deliverance and healing.

When the time came for His redemptive sacrifice, Jesus stood before Pilate and the Jewish leaders as the representative of mankind. He willingly accepted their verdict, knowing that they were God’s instruments in His judgment of the sin of mankind.

Although He Himself was sinless, He accepted the responsibility for our sins as if they were His own, and received the judgment and punishment for them in His own body – even to the death of the cross. He bore the punishment for our sins that we might be received by God as being righteous.

**“All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”** Isaiah 53:6.

“For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21.

On the cross Jesus represented mankind with all of its sinfulness. He bore the punishment of the sins of all mankind. At the end He cried out **“It is finished.”** His redemption of mankind was complete. And at that moment the veil in the temple before the Holy of Holies, which contained the symbol of the presence of God, was rent from top to bottom, signifying that the way was open for man to have communion with God. The curse of the fall was banished, and man was reconciled to God.

“Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ...” 2 Corinthians 5:18.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:13.

SALVATION THROUGH GRACE AND NOT WORKS

Salvation by grace has its basis in Jesus bearing the punishment for our sins in His own body on the cross. This has been a stumbling block for many would be Christians, who feel that they need to earn their own salvation by, for example, being a good person, by their own good works, by philanthropy, or by regularly attending church. These things are not wrong in themselves, but reliance on them for our salvation negates the grace of God. No one can gain their salvation by any other means than the unmerited grace of God. **SALVATION IS ONLY ACQUIRED BY BELIEVING THAT JESUS CHRIST BORE THE PUNISHMENT FOR OUR SINS ON THE CROSS.** In God’s eyes, this is the only basis for our righteousness and acceptance by Him.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:4-9.

Note that even the faith to receive the good news of our salvation is a gift from God. Indeed, there is nothing at all that we may boast about. **ALL IS BY THE GRACE OF GOD.**

HOW WE ENTER INTO OUR SALVATION

In John 3:16, and Romans 10:8, we are shown the basic elements in receiving salvation.

John 3:16; **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**

Romans 10:8: **“...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto”**

righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "*Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.*" Rom 10:8-11.

Both readings stress our need to believe in all that the Scriptures tell us about the Lord Jesus Christ. We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who was born of a virgin.

He bore the punishment for our sins on the cross, so that we are righteous in God's sight.

Jesus was raised from the dead and is now reunited with God in heaven.

We must believe these things in our hearts and confess them with our mouth.

Included in our salvation is a declaration that we choose to make Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives.

By faith we believe that WE HAVE BEEN SAVED and that our names are written in the book of life.

PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL TRUTH

The bible declares that due to our salvation through Christ's redeeming death on the cross for us, in God's eyes we are "**holy, and blameless, and above reproach,**" and "**the righteousness of God**" in Jesus Christ.

"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard..." Colossians 1:21-23.

"For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:2.

The trouble is that we look at ourselves and see our continual sinfulness. So what is the truth? Paul says that there are two realms of truth – physical and spiritual.

"...we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Cori 4:18.

He says that the physical things that we see around us are temporary, but the unseen or spiritual things are eternal.

The spiritual truth is that we have been saved and reconciled to God, and are perfectly righteous and above reproach in His sight. That truth is eternal, ascribed to us in heaven.

The physical truth is that we are a work in progress, sinning and repenting, continually changing as we steadily grow towards righteousness and holiness. What we are at any one time is temporary.

Paul says that we should keep our minds on the spiritual truth of who we are in Jesus Christ -- holy and righteous before God.

"Set your mind on things above [your spiritual blessings in Christ], not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Colossians 3:2-4.

On the other hand, Satan always tries to focus our attention on our earthly state, continually accusing us of our sinfulness, so that we might question our righteousness in God's eyes, and even the validity of our salvation. We must never lose sight of the eternal truth, that through Jesus Christ, we are eternally righteous and above reproach in God's sight. Our eternal righteousness and salvation remain secure as long as we "**...continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard...**" Colossians 1:23.

THE GRACE, LOVE, AND WISDOM OF GOD

In many ways the process of salvation demonstrates the grace, love, and wisdom of God, which is extended to **everyone**, regardless of their birth, race, their morality, or social background.

“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” 1 John 2:2.

No one is advantaged or disadvantaged by their intelligence, their morality, or their station in life. Each one must receive salvation on the same terms. Each one must come to the realisation that he is a sinner, and needs the salvation of the Lord. Each one must believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who bore the punishment for their own sins on the cross. Each one must accept God’s grace, and not try to earn his salvation by moral purity and good works. Each one must believe by faith, and confess his salvation before God.

It may be much easier for a despised sinner, or a disadvantaged person, to embrace salvation than one who the world regards as clean living and without reproach.

Due to God’s grace, it is never too late for a sinner to receive salvation – even on their deathbed. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1), the labourers who came late and only worked for a brief time, received the same wages as they who had laboured all day.

SALVATION IS FOLLOWED BY BAPTISM

Consistently in the Scriptures salvation was immediately followed by baptism by full immersion – a physical symbolic enactment of what had taken place in the spiritual world.

Being immersed in the water, symbolises our ‘old man’ put to death in Christ, and entombed with Him. Being raised out of the water symbolises being raised as a ‘new creation’ with a new life with a regenerated spirit.

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4.

Although it might appear that nothing has changed after being baptised, spiritually we have been baptised into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Spiritually, baptism establishes us in our new home, in Christ in God. As we embrace this truth, Satan’s power over us is greatly diminished.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:3-4.

“Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17-18.