

# Salvation

## God Gives Us a Second Chance

It's an incredible concept: The God of the Universe—the Creator, Lord, and Master of everything—takes notice of you and me. And it doesn't end there. He wants us to know Him and experience what it's like to be close to Him. Simply put, God wants a relationship with us. Does that seem unbelievable? After all, the governor of your state probably doesn't know you by name. Could the Governor of the Universe be concerned about who you are and where your life is headed?

Amazingly, He is!

For many, the biggest roadblock to embracing this idea that God cares so deeply about us can be distilled into one word: regret. We look at our past, the bad decisions and decidedly unholy pursuits, and conclude that we're in no condition to approach the King of Kings. For us, great comfort can be found through none other than the apostle Paul, who spoke of his own battles in graphic terms: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24,25).

What an incredible statement. God wants to rescue us from our sins—to give us a second chance. No matter who we are or what we've done (Paul himself had terrorized the Christians of his day as their most feared persecutor), God offers forgiveness and a new life. He has plans for every person that include a close, loving relationship with Him. And so passionate is He about these plans that He embarked on the greatest "rescue mission" of all time by sending His Son, Jesus, to our world 2,000 years ago.

So now, we all face an important decision. We must reach out and accept this Savior. Relationship is a two-way street. When we respond in repentance to a holy God, He declares us clean, pure, and acceptable in His sight. He welcomes us into His spiritual family and begins the process of helping us grow and mature. That's what salvation is all about. It's not just some lofty religious concept. It's a life-changing relationship with the Almighty God.

### 1. We Were Created for a Purpose.

#### A. We have been created in God's image. (*Genesis 1:26*)

"Image of God" refers to our spiritual, not physical, image. In the beginning we were uniquely created by God to reflect His love and holiness. This distinguished us from animals and every other form of creation. As a result, we are able to experience the spiritual realm and choose between good and evil. This ability to discern right from wrong makes us accountable for our actions. Our "inner likeness" to God also allows us to have close fellowship with Him.

#### B. God's ultimate plan: fellowship with us. (*John 1:12; Hebrews 8:10*)

Through the ministry of Jesus we catch a powerful picture of how God wants to interact with the people He has created. We're not generic organisms randomly wandering the earth without purpose. God desires fellowship with the people He has created. He wants to call us children, to be with and nurture us. (See 2 Corinthians 6:16-18.) It is a uniquely parental-styled role; we belong to Him and He is our Father. Hebrews 8:10 reveals that God desires to have an active role in our lives, molding and guiding us with purpose.

## **2. Sin Left Us Needing a Second Chance.**

### **A. God's image within enables us to choose good and evil. (Romans 1:20; 2:14,15)**

While the Bible is our "textbook on the spiritual realm," such knowledge is not limited to those who actually scan its pages. Nature itself bears witness to God's existence. As a result, we do not live in ignorance of Him and are morally responsible for our response to what can be known about Him. We are without excuse if we ignore, reject, or even fail to ever recognize His existence because it has been made known to us that He exists. In short, we are uniquely created with conscience, by which God enables us to make moral judgments and understand moral absolutes of right and wrong. This conscience may become weak or twisted if we reject what is right, but its presence leaves us accountable for our choices.

### **B. Sin = Going our own way. (Proverbs 16:25; James 1:13-15)**

Sin can be defined as rebellion against God, His ways, and His plans for us. We cannot blame God, or even Satan, for our sin. The human tendency toward sin is common to all, and it manifests itself in the face of temptation. Sin is a product of our will and a reflection of our nature. It occurs when we choose to follow a course of action apart from what is right in God's eyes. Ultimately, our failures and wrong decisions leave us separated from God and headed in the wrong direction. This sin problem will lead to judgment and eternal separation from God.

### **C. Sin has been a problem from the beginning. (Genesis 2:17; 3:6)**

From the beginning, God intended humanity to confront the reality of moral choices. Adam and Eve, like all of us, were created to express the image of God. Yet they allowed their minds to focus on what was forbidden. Simply put, they lusted. And lust opens the door to an endless number of ways to express sin. (See James 1:13-15.) In the same way, we're confronted with opportunities to focus on the things God forbids. And, like Adam and Eve, if those temptations are not rejected, we will sin.

### **D. All of us are guilty. (Romans 3:10-12)**

The Jews prided themselves on the idea that they could be spared guilt for sin by following the deeds of the Law. But the apostle Paul gave them a painful dose of reality: every human being is guilty of sin. No one can point to his or her goodness, status, or accomplishments and claim to be untouched by the stain of sin. We can never be good enough through our own efforts.

### **E. Sin's inescapable consequences leave us desperate for a second chance. (John 3:3; Romans 2:12)**

Mere good works can't save us from the consequences of sin. Neither can claims of ignorance that we somehow didn't know what we were doing. In ourselves we are unprepared, unworthy, and unable to experience fellowship with God, to live in His kingdom. We need new birth from above, new life, and a new nature. Nothing short of total transformation will do.

## **3. Through Jesus, God gave us a second chance.**

### **A. God pursued us. (*Matthew 20:28; Luke 19:10; John 3:16*)**

God's plan for salvation is like nothing seen in any other world religion. At its foundation, Christianity does not place the means to salvation in our hands. God alone took the initiative. He pursued us through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Why? Because of His incredible love. What a profound mystery: God loved His Son. God loved humanity even after we had turned from Him and became sinful. And God gave His Son to suffer and die for the sake of humanity.

### **B. Jesus paid the price for us. (*Romans 5:12-19; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22*)**

Sin entered the human race through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and it has been transmitted down to every person throughout time. This does not mean that we are guilty of their sin. Rather, we have inherited the moral corruption and impulse toward evil, and are guilty of our own wrong choices and sinful actions. From the beginning, this sin has carried a penalty: God's judgment. Yet that penalty was borne by Jesus Christ. Through His death on the cross—His shed blood—we receive forgiveness that we could never find in ourselves. The blood of sacrifice was the only cure for our sins, and Jesus was the only One who could pay the penalty.

### **C. We cannot save ourselves. (*Ephesians 2:8,9*)**

Some say that salvation is obtained by doing good things, or that God will simply overlook our sins because He is a loving God. But these ideas are inaccurate; salvation comes by grace—unmerited and unearned favor. God's grace is not the result of His being "big hearted" enough to waive our penalty (though His grace *is* motivated by His love for us). God is just, and His nature demands that He not deal lightly with sin. For that reason, it's accurate to say that God's grace results from the fact that He Himself, through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, has paid the penalty for sin. We are pardoned not because God excuses our sins or is too kind to follow through with judgment, but because He paid a price we could never pay. For this reason, it is arrogant for us to ever presume that our actions have somehow brought God's special, saving favor. Such grace was secured through divine means, as there was no other way. God alone changed hopelessness to hope.

### **D. Salvation comes only through Jesus Christ. (*John 14:6; Acts 4:12*)**

Many today argue that Jesus is just one of many ways to salvation, claims crushed by the words of John 14:6. Building on this passage, in Acts 4, Christ's declaration was portrayed in real-life terms, as Peter confronted the very religious leaders who had rejected Christ and His claims, and condemned Him to the cross. Peter proclaimed that Jesus superseded all other means humanity might claim for access to God. When rejecting Him, one has rejected the only valid way to salvation. There is no other road to take. (See Hebrews 10:19-22.) The truth that Jesus is the sole means of obtaining God's grace and the only hope of approaching God is foundational to the teachings of Christianity.

## **4. Salvation Alters Our Past, Present, and Future.**

### **A. Our past is gone. (*Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17*)**

Because of Christ, we're able to stand before God pure and forgiven. This is called "justification." The term has judicial implications and evokes thoughts of a courtroom. We stand guilty before God but are acquitted and declared clean. The sins of the past become irrelevant, as they are no longer held against us. We have been made new. Christ's death and resurrection allow us to make a radical break from who we were, bringing us into a totally new sphere of existence. From that point forward we are free from the past as we walk in close relationship with Christ.

### **B. Our present is shaped by God's hand.**

## **1. Salvation brings childlike assurance. (*Romans 8:15,16*)**

When we receive salvation, we no longer need to live in fear of God's judgment or feel the crushing weight of condemnation over the past. Instead, we are God's children, at peace in the knowledge that we enjoy full rights and benefits as a result. The term Abba (an Aramaic word for father, see Galatians 4:6) conveys the depth of emotion and intimacy that exists between a loving father and a child.

## **2. Salvation changes how we live. (*Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 2:3-5*)**

The change is two-fold: how we interact with others and with God. In the case of others, this means seeking their well-being no matter what they do to us. Such a practice is utterly contrary to our nature as well as the ways of the world around us. We are also instructed to pursue holiness. To be "holy" means to be separated from sin and set apart or consecrated for God's purpose. There is a sense of purpose in holiness; it is more than just being good and shunning wrong. It points to God's bigger plan for us—a plan revealed in 1 John 2:3-5. Faith in Christ is demonstrated as genuine by our behavior...how we live. The radical change of direction God has performed in our hearts can be clearly seen by our commitment to follow Him with our lives. Such a lifestyle stands in stark contrast to what we were or would have been without Christ.

## **3. God gives us wisdom and help to live for Him. (*John 14:26*)**

The "Counselor" described in John 14:26 is the Holy Spirit. From Him we receive teaching about Jesus' words and ministry as well as power to recall what He taught. Such recall is valuable as we battle to overcome temptation and tell others about our faith.

## **4. God gives purpose to our lives. (*2 Corinthians 5:14,15*)**

Jesus died to give us new life, to the point that the very nature of our lives is changed. We no longer live for ourselves, to serve our own interests with only the immediate in view. We are now motivated by His love to follow an eternal purpose.

## **C. Our future is assured. (*1 Corinthians 2:9; Romans 6:23*)**

Salvation changes our destiny, as God promises us eternal life. He never intended for us to die, but made us to be immortal. Death, physical and spiritual, came into the world only as a result of sin. Consequently, Jesus did everything possible to give us opportunity for new life and relationship with Him. In the end He waits at the "finish line" of our lives to welcome us home.

## **5. Salvation Must Not Be Neglected.**

### **A. Judgment is real. (*Hebrews 2:2,3*)**

Verse 3 offers a rhetorical question referring to God's judgment, affirming that there is no escape outside of salvation. That's why the warning is clear: listen to what we have heard regarding Christ. Salvation through Him is the only way to avoid God's wrath and ultimately face eternal suffering and separation from Him in hell.

### **B. Today's challenges can't compare to our eternal rewards. (*Romans 8:16-18*)**

It's important to remember that becoming a Christian does not solve all of our problems. We will have challenges, some brought on specifically by our commitment to Christ. The fact is that salvation naturally brings struggles and challenges, but these must not deter us. Our experience with Christ transcends this world and gives us access to eternity. In the race of life we much focus on the destination and not be distracted by the length of the path or the route we must take to get there.

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