

SALVATION

Jesus is called *Savior*, because He came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The concept of salvation is fundamental to Christianity. In this chapter we examine what it means to be saved.

Who needs to be saved?

Everyone! The Bible makes it clear that the entire human race is in need of the salvation provided by Jesus Christ. There are no exceptions. This is because we are all infected by what the Bible calls "sin." This infection has progressed to different degrees in different people, so that there are obvious differences in moral character from person to person. Nevertheless, the infection is present in all of us, and it is deadly. We are all sinners (Romans 3:10-18, 23).

What is sin?

In the beginning when God created the universe, everything He made was good (Genesis 1). All things were designed by God to operate according to the laws He established.

The third chapter of Genesis tells the story of how the first man and woman broke the law of God, with disastrous results. At that point, God's perfect creation was marred, and though it still shows the glory of its Designer, it has never been the same. Since that time the world has been plagued by pain and sorrow, suffering and death. And every human being born into the world since (with the exception of Jesus Christ) has shown by his actions an inborn tendency to rebel against God's law. This is what we mean by "sin."

Sin is not a small matter. To sin is not just to make a minor mistake, or to break some arbitrary rule set up by society. To sin is to set oneself in opposition to God, and to transgress against the very foundations upon which the universe is built. When we sin we attempt to make ourselves the ultimate law-givers, and substitute our own self-made laws for the laws of God. We thereby wreck the

design of God both for our own individual lives and for the world we live in.

Sin can be defined simply as "doing as you please" (Isaiah 53:6). This may sound innocent enough, until we realize that it is in reality a rejection of God's authority over His creation. When we sin we rebel against the One who created and sustains our lives, and claim for ourselves the right to determine how to run things. Every sin is an act of defiance, an attempt to push God off His throne and take His place.

Sin also includes the failure to do what we ought to do (James 4:17). Sin is failing to recognize the authority of God and to offer Him the worship, thanks and obedience that are His due (Romans 1:18-21). Sin is failing to live up to our responsibilities as sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and as stewards of God's creation. Sin is failing to love God and others (Matthew 22:37-39).

Sin has its root in pride and selfishness. These things are first of all inward conditions. They eventually result in outward actions, but the source of the problem is located inside us, in what we are, not just in what we do (Matthew 5:21,22, 27,28). We sin because we are by nature sinners.

What are the results of sin?

Because of sin, all of humanity is under the wrath of God, deserving of punishment for breaking His laws. We are all guilty before Him, and stand condemned with no excuse to offer (Ephesians 2:1-3). As condemned sinners, we face a destiny of eternal punishment in hell, the place God has set aside for those who refuse to submit to His authority.

God warned Adam and Eve that disobedience to His law would result in death. More than the decay and eventual mortality that afflicts our physical bodies, this refers to the spiritual death that now afflicts the soul of every person born into the world.

God created us to have communion with Him, to know and fellowship with Him. But sin brought separation from God, as our

rebellion cut us off from Him. Because of sin, the spirit of man (that part of him which relates to and communes with God) is dead, and humanity has lost the consciousness of God's presence. In this state of spiritual death, we can neither see, know, nor please God.

Sin is deceitful; we are fooled into thinking we will find freedom in rejecting the law of God and becoming our own boss. But in fact, sin robs us of freedom and puts us in bondage (John 8:34). We find ourselves trapped, unable to free ourselves from sin's power, unable to do what we know is right (Romans 7:18, 19).

Thus the natural state of sinful humanity is an unhappy one: guilty, spiritually dead, and enslaved to sin. Moreover, sin is never a private matter; its repercussions spill over into the family (broken relationships, divorce), into society (crime, injustice) and into the natural world (pollution, waste).

What can we do to save ourselves from sin and its results?

How can those who are morally defiled cleanse the stain of sin from their souls? How can slaves tear off their chains of bondage? How can the dead bring themselves back to life?

The truth is it is impossible for us to save ourselves. There is nothing we can do to remove the guilt of our sin. We cannot undo the sins we have committed; what's done is done, and the past cannot be changed. So even if we were never to commit another sin in the future, the sins of the past would remain to condemn us.

Worse still, the problem goes deeper than the evil acts themselves. Remember that sin is first an inward condition, a problem that afflicts our very nature (Jeremiah 13:23). The infection in our heart needs to be cured. This is beyond our ability. We need help.

What did God do about our condition?

Thank God, He did not leave us in this hopeless state. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ, the God-man, took upon Himself the punishment for our sins when He suffered and died on a Roman cross. Though Jesus was divine, He suffered death as a mortal man;

though He was righteous and innocent, He was punished in our place (Isaiah 53:4-6). After three days, He was raised from the dead in victory over sin and death, having broken the bonds which held us captive (Acts 2:24).

God did this in order to reunite us with Himself, to restore the relationship that our sin had broken. God did not and could not overlook our sin, but He paid the price to make amends for it and redeem us from its curse (Ephesians 1:7).

God became man in order to do what we could not do for ourselves. He came to earth and died in order to bring us back to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19-21). His resurrection proved and sealed His defeat of sin and its penalty, death. Through grace God provided a remedy for our desperate predicament.

What is grace?

We are saved by God's grace. This means that salvation is all God's doing. We are not saved because we deserve it, are worthy of it, or do something to earn it. There is nothing in us that deserves the salvation God offers us; it is a free gift that flows to us from God's unfathomable love. Our attempts to be or to do good can add nothing to what Christ has already done. He is the Savior, and He alone saves (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

How do we receive the salvation God has provided in Christ?

Even though God has done everything necessary to provide for our salvation, it does not come to us automatically. We must receive the gift God offers. How do we do this?

- *Repent* -- In order to receive salvation in Christ, we must first recognize our need for it. This means confessing our sinful condition and turning from it to seek God's forgiveness.
- *Believe* -- We must believe that this forgiveness is ours in Christ, and trust in Him alone to save us.
- *Submit* -- We must put our lives in His hands and give Him

complete control, for only then can He save us. Jesus is both Savior and Lord.

A simple prayer is all that is necessary to call upon the name of the Lord and receive the salvation that is ours in Christ (Romans 10:9-13).

What happens when we put our faith in Christ?

God made the first move when Christ became man to die for our sins. He makes the next move, as well, when He causes us to hear and understand the gospel of salvation, and draws us to Himself by His Holy Spirit (John 6:44). When we respond to His call in repentance and faith, believing and receiving this gospel, God moves again. When God saves us, several things happen:

* We are *justified* (Romans 3:23-26). This means that we are declared innocent in God's sight. Christ has taken our sin upon Himself, and in return we are clothed with His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). All of our sin is removed from us and forgotten (Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 43:25), and we stand before God blameless.

* We are *regenerated* (Ephesians 2:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17). Our spirits, which were dead because of sin, are given a new birth through the Holy Spirit of God (John 3:3-8). We become spiritually alive, and our communion with God is restored. The heart that was infected with sin is cleansed and made new. We are united with Christ and given new life, eternal life, His life in us.

* We are *adopted* into God's family (Romans 8:14-17). With our new birth, we are reborn into the family of God. He takes us to Himself and counts us as His children. We have a new relationship with God, and can truly call Him "Father," as His Holy Spirit comes to live within us and mark us as His possession (Ephesians 1:13, 14). How great is God's grace, which goes even beyond justifying and cleansing us, to make us His very own

children (1 John 3:1)!

For what purpose are we saved?

When we receive God's gift of salvation in Christ, it is only the first step in a never-ending journey together with God. God saves us for a purpose, in order that we may love, serve and glorify Him throughout our lives in this world and through all eternity beyond (Ephesians 2:10; John 17:24).

God's ultimate goal is that we become like Christ, conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). God is at work in me and in you, to make us more and more like Jesus. Everything that He does in us and for us, everything He brings into our lives, has this glorious end in view. And we can be confident that God will complete this marvelous work He has begun in us, for His own glory (Philippians 1:6).

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

1. How does Paul describe our lives before we were saved?
2. What did God do for us? Why?
3. How are we saved?
4. What is faith?
5. What is God's purpose for our lives?