

SALVATION

Key Verse: Ephesians 2:8-9

Key Idea: I believe a person comes to a right relationship with God by His grace, his faith in Jesus Christ.

Key Question: How can I have a relationship with a holy God?

Prior to Jesus' birth, an angel told his earthly father, Joseph, that he was to name the baby in Mary's womb Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Jesus did save his people from their sins – both through the life he lived and through the death he died. The work Jesus did in living and dying to earn our salvation is sometimes referred to as the atonement.

The Cause of the Atonement

Scripture is clear: Christ came to earn our salvation because of God's faithful love (or mercy) and justice. God's love is affirmed in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." God's justice is affirmed when Paul writes that God put forward Jesus "as a propitiation" (Rom. 3:25), that is, a sacrifice that bears God's wrath so that God looks favorably toward us. Paul says this was done "to show God's righteousness" and also "so that he might be just" (Rom. 3:25-26). In other words, the sins God "passed over" or didn't punish before Christ came to earth had to be punished somehow if God was to "be just." Therefore, someone had to take the punishment for those sins, and that someone was Jesus. In Jesus' life and death, we find a full expression of God's justice (sin is punished) and faithful love (God gave his own Son to bear the punishment).

The Necessity of the Atonement

Although it was not necessary that God save any people at all, in his love he chose to save some. Once he made that decision, God's justice made it necessary for Christ to live the life he lived and die the death he died.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he rhetorically asked, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). Jesus knew there was no other way for God to save us than for him to die in our place. Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins. Other means, like the sacrifices offered for sins in the Old Testament had no lasting value, for "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Jesus, "by means of his own blood," secured "an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12), thereby putting away sin "by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26).

The Nature of the Atonement

And yet, if Christ has only offered himself as a sacrifice, thereby earning us forgiveness of sins, we would only have access to a partial salvation. Although our guilt would be removed, we would be like Adam and Eve when they were first created: guilt-free but capable of sin and having no lifelong record of obedience. And in order to enter into fellowship with God, we would need to live a life of perfect obedience.

Therefore, Christ had to live a life of perfect obedience to God so that the positive merits of that obedience could be counted for us. This is what Paul means when he says, "by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). And this is why Paul does not count on his own righteousness, but instead counts on "that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from

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God that depends on faith" (Phil. 3:9). Christ, through the sinless life he lived, became "our righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30).

Jesus also lived a life of suffering. He was, in the words of Isaiah "despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). He suffered when he was assaulted by Satan's attacks and temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). He "endured from sinners" tremendous "hostility against himself" (Heb. 12:3). He was tremendously grieved at the death of his close friend Lazarus (John 11:35). It was through these and other sufferings that "he learned obedience" (though he never once disobeyed) and "became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9).

But the physical pain was nothing compared to the spiritual pain. Jesus never sinned. Jesus hated sin. Yet Jesus voluntarily took upon himself all the sins of those who one day would be saved. "He bore the sins of many" (Isa. 53:12). That which he hated with his whole being was poured out upon him. As Peter tells us, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). "For our sake," God made Christ "to be sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus became a "curse for us" to redeem us "from the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13).

The Result of the Atonement

Christ lived a perfect, sinless life and died a horrific, sinner's death in order to "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He paid the penalty we deserved to pay for our sin. He bore the wrath we deserved to bear. He overcame the separation our sin caused between God and us. He freed us from the bondage caused by sin. Because of Christ's work on our behalf, God can "deliver us from the domain of darkness" and transfer "us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). What a great salvation!

Personal Questions

1. Why was it necessary for Jesus to come and live a perfect life on earth?
2. Why was it necessary that Jesus die? Could he have saved us in some other way?
3. How does your understanding of the atonement humble you? How does it encourage you?

Paul sets forth an order in which the blessings of salvation come to Christians when he writes in Romans 8:30: "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

Effective Calling

The calling Paul refers to in Romans 8:30 is a calling that came specifically to all who are believers in Jesus.

When God calls people in this powerful way, he calls them "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9); he calls them "into the fellowship of his Son" (1 Cor. 1:9; cf. Acts 2:39) and "into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12; cf. 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 1:3). People who have been called by God "belong to Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:6). They are called to "be saints" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2) and have come into a realm of peace (1 Cor. 7:15; Col. 3:15), freedom (Gal. 5:13), hope (Eph. 1:18; 4:4), holiness (1 Thess. 4:7), patient endurance of suffering (1 Peter 2:20-21; 3:9), and eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12).

General Calling and the Gospel Call

But there is a broader sense of "calling" that refers to any preaching of the gospel to anyone, whether they respond or not. In distinction from effective calling, which always brings response, we can talk

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about the "gospel call" in general, which goes forth to all people, and which is sometimes referred to as *external calling or general calling*.

The gospel call goes forth through the human preaching of the gospel. Paul makes this clear in 2 Thessalonians 2:14, when he writes to believers that their calling from God came through "our gospel" – that is, the gospel that Paul and others preached to them. That is why it is important that we boldly proclaim the gospel message, trusting that God will, through his effective call, do what he did with Lydia in Acts 16:14: "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."

Elements of the Gospel Call

There are three key elements that should be a part of every gospel call: an explanation of the facts concerning salvation; an invitation to respond to Christ personally in repentance and faith; and a promise of forgiveness and eternal life.

The facts concerning salvation are basically these:

1. All people have sinned (Rom. 3:23)
2. The penalty for our sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
3. Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (Rom. 5:8).

But simply stating these facts isn't enough. There must be an invitation to repent and believe this good news personally. One such invitation, originally spoken by Jesus many years ago and found in Matthew 11:28-30, should still be heard as if Jesus were speaking it to you today: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

To those who respond in faith to the gospel call, God promises that their sins will be forgiven and that they will experience eternal life with God himself. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). As Jesus said in John 6:37, "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

How the Call is Received

After the invitation to respond to the gospel is given, God must bring about a change in an individual's heart before he or she is able to respond in faith. That change, a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us, is sometimes called regeneration. We play no role in this regeneration; it is completely an act of God.

This change of heart is described in Ezekiel 36:26: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

This instantaneous event changes everything. Once it happens, recipients are, in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17, "a new creation. The old has passed away...the new has come." This change, although not always immediately realized, results in a transformed heart that leads to a transformed character that produces a transformed life. All areas of life are changed. A regenerated individual should expect a new love for God and his people (Matt. 22:37-40), a heartfelt obedience to his commands (John 14:15), and the Christ-like character traits Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

How the Call is Responded To

Once God has summoned through an effective call and changed a person's heart through regeneration, the necessary response is repentance and faith. But since the gospel call is a personal call, it requires a

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personal response. This willing, personal, individual response to the gospel call, in which a person sincerely repents of his sins and places his trust in Christ for salvation, is called conversion.

Simply knowing and affirming the facts of salvation as stated above in the gospel call is not enough. True saving faith, while it includes knowledge (knowing the facts of salvation) and approval (agreeing that the facts are true), also requires trust. Therefore, one who has true saving faith has moved from investigating Jesus' claims to believing that these claims are true and from believing these claims are true to trusting in Jesus for forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. If I have true saving faith, I no longer simply believe facts about Jesus; instead, I personally trust Jesus to save me. The Bible uses strong language to describe this personal trust: we do not just have to "believe Jesus" (that is, believe that what he says is truthful), but we have to "believe in him" (that is, put personal trust in him and depend on him): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

This trust involves two aspects: repentance and faith. Paul preached a gospel "of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). The author of Hebrews says that the first two elements of foundational Christian teaching are "repentance from dead works" and "faith toward God" (Heb. 6:1). Repentance means a conscious decision to turn away from your sins, and faith means turning to Christ to forgive those sins. This kind of faith is admitting that you can't save yourself and at the same time believing that Christ can.

Repentance and faith are really two sides of the same coin. For when I genuinely renounce and forsake my sin, I then turn in faith to Christ, trusting in him alone for my salvation. And this initial repentance and faith provides a pattern for ongoing heart attitudes of repentance and faith that continue for the rest of a Christian's life. As Paul writes in Colossians 2:6, "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him."

Personal Questions

1. How does someone become a Christian?
2. Can you explain what it means to truly believe in Jesus? What does it mean to truly repent of sins?
3. In what ways can Christians give evidence of their belief in Jesus?

Material from Christian Beliefs, by Wayne Grudem

SALVATION

Group Study

OPEN

What are some common beliefs regarding how/why sin is forgiven that are not from the Bible?

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

Key Question: How do I have a _____ with God? _____ is found in Jesus.

Jesus has made the way possible for us to be _____ of our sins and come into a relationship with God. What is our part? How do we take hold of this _____ offer?

Key Verse: "For it is by _____ you have been saved, through _____ - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

In order for the sacrifice of Christ to be applied to us individually we must reach out and _____ it by faith.

This is the only way to _____ Adam's decision and restore a right relationship with God.

(Key Application) No matter what _____ I face in this life, they pale in comparison to my salvation for eternity.

(Key Application) I need to walk in _____ and _____ grace to others.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read Matthew 16:13-21

1. How would you define the word "grace"? What is the opposite of grace?
2. What specifically would it look like for us to offer grace to people who don't deserve it, as God did for us?
3. Without naming names, who is someone in your life who doesn't deserve your love and kindness, but you offer it anyway?
4. Many people find it hard to receive something they didn't earn. Discuss how this behavior could hinder someone's spiritual growth.
5. How would you describe Adam and Eve's life in the garden with God before they disobeyed him? What was life like for them afterward?
6. Recalling the details of Jesus' time on earth, what similarities do you see in prophecy of the "suffering servant" from the book of Isaiah?

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7. Can you pinpoint a moment or chart a sequence of moments in time when you realized that Christ died for you? How would you describe that process?
8. Why is it important to both believe in our hearts and profess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord?

Read Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12-21 together and choose 1-2 questions that will lead to the greatest discussion in your group.

1. How did Adam and Eve's decision to disobey God affect all of mankind?
2. How did Jesus' choices overturn the effect of Adam and Eve's sin in our lives?
3. What do these Scriptures tell you about the character of God and his feelings toward you and all of humanity?

KEY APPLICATION:

By trusting in Jesus' death on the cross in my place, I can be forgiven and have a relationship with God.

APPLICATION

List 3 people you want to see come to faith in Jesus. Then pray for each one by name. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict them of their need and convince them of Jesus' death in their place.

NEXT WEEK

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 12:13 (Romans 8:13-16)

Key Idea: I believe in the Holy Spirit

Key Question: What is the distinctive work of the Holy Spirit?

Study Passages

1 Corinthians 2:10-11; 3:16	Romans 8:13-16, 26	John 16:7-15
1 Corinthians 12:7, 12-13	Psalms 51:11	Galatians 4:6
Genesis 6:3	Ephesians 1:13, 17; 5:8-11	1 Thess. 5:19

Questions:

1. Why is it hard to think of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity instead of just a force or the power of God in action?
2. How have you been aware of the Spirit's work in your life?
3. How does the Holy Spirit help us live the Christian life?
4. How does the Holy Spirit help us pray?

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5. In the OT, the Spirit only came on certain people for a certain amount of time. (Read Judges 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). What is the difference since Pentecost? Why is this important?
6. What does it mean to “quench the Spirit?” (1 Thess. 5:19)