

GOD JUST TOUCHED ME - WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT

Chapter 7 - SALVATION

Definition

The word salvation is often used by Christians. However, there are many people, including some Christians, who are not sure what salvation means. Webster's dictionary defines salvation as "being saved from danger, evil, difficulty, or destruction." Back in the 1960s some people went around carrying bags of Bible tracts, accosting people, and asking them "Are you saved?" Christians would answer yes, but non-Christians would ask "Saved from what?" They were totally unaware of any danger or evil lurking around. The Christian knows we are saved from sin. For most Christians the date they were saved is important. It marks the first day of the rest of their life lived for Jesus. Salvation does include being saved, but goes beyond the one event. Salvation is a process. Not only is your relationship with God restored, but you are also restored to the way God originally created mankind, in His image. The relationship part is an instant process. The image part takes the rest of your life.

All Need Salvation

The truth is that everyone has fallen short of the mark (Romans 3:23). All sin, any sin, makes one a sinner, and all sin cuts us off from our holy God. All sin leads to death, regardless of how great or small we think it is. Every person faces temptations (James 1:14). The enemy puts wrong thoughts into our minds. Then temptation comes from evil desires within, and temptations become sin when we dwell on them and allow them to become actions. As descendants of Adam and Eve we are all subject to failure. The tendency to sin is like inheriting a faulty spiritual gene from Adam and Eve. However, we are not judged for their sins but for our own, because we all have failed (Romans 5:12). All humans are sinners by nature (the natural man) and by practice. We all need salvation. Sin is a serious matter, and even after being saved we continue to stumble. We need to acknowledge that we have not reached perfection yet (1 John 1:8). When we say all have fallen there seems to be no hope for humanity, but that is not quite true. There is one who has not fallen, Jesus. He lived His life as a human and He experienced all the temptations we do, and He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). Satan tempted Him on physical needs and desires, on possessions and power, and on pride (Matthew 4:1-10). That pretty much covers all the categories sin falls under. Our hope is in Jesus.

There is something blocking our return to God (Isaiah 59:1:2).) In our fallen state we are not capable of fixing the ruptured relationship with our God. We do not have the power or the skills to return by ourselves. Sin offends God and separates us from Him. Sin builds a wall between God and the people He loves. Because God is holy He can neither ignore sin nor pretend sin did not happen. He cannot tolerate sin as if it did not matter, because it does matter and it brings spiritual death. Because God is holy He cannot allow sin in His presence. When we commit a sin that sin leaves it's mark on us (Job 10:14), and when God wants to look on us He sees sin and turns away. Because He is a God of love He made a way back for us. The Jews had to sacrifice an animal for sin for there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Leviticus 17:11). What applied to the Jews also applies to us (Hebrews 9:22). The penalty of sin is death. Blood represents life and the shedding of blood indicated death. However, for the Jews, there was forgiveness only for inadvertent sin (Leviticus 4:1&2, Leviticus 5:15). It is possible to know what is sinful and still do something wrong when emotionally upset. Later when you calm down, realize that it was in fact sin. God provided atonement. For the Jews, as for us, the sacrifice had to be perfect, without blemish (Leviticus 1:3&10, Leviticus 4:32, Leviticus 22:20). The unblemished animal of the Old Testament symbolized the

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perfection demanded by our holy God and the perfect nature of the real sacrifice to come, Jesus the Christ.

Jesus

Jesus did what we could not do (Colossians 1:13,14,19-22). No other person who ever lived or ever will live could do what Jesus did and survive. No one else ever lived a perfect sinless life. He rescued us from the darkness imposed by the enemy, and ushered us into the light of His kingdom. He redeemed us, bought us back, and forgave all our sins. However, what Jesus did does not mean that all people will be saved. It means that a way has been made for everyone who will trust Him to be saved. It is as if a heavenly trust fund has been established, sufficient to cover every sin ever committed or ever to be committed. We still must apply for the grant. Praise God that He is a God of second chances.

When Jesus lived on earth as a human He identified Himself with humanity to such a degree that He accepted responsibility for all human sin (Romans 5:18). He took our sins upon Himself and took our punishment upon Himself. Through faith in Christ we are restored to our God instead of being His enemies separated from Him. Jesus came specifically to set us free from the bondage of sin (Galatians 1:4). As a matter of fact, He went so far as to become sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He traded us His righteousness for our sin, which seems to be anything but a fair trade. That is how much He loves us. Our sin was nailed to the tree (1 Peter 2:24). Christ died for us so we would not have to suffer the punishment we deserve. We were held captive and He bought our freedom (1 Corinthians 6:20). When we accept what He did to free us from the bondage of sin we become His and we are obligated to His service. The price He paid was tremendous (Mark 10:45). We were not capable of paying it because we were spiritually bankrupt. Whenever anyone is held captive for ransom they have to depend on someone else to pay the price. The price He paid was sufficient to cover all the evil humanity could ever do (Titus 2:14, John 1:29). When Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice it took care of all the world's sin. The job was finished (John 19:30). That means that the price was paid in full, the total penalty for all sin, past, present, and future was taken care of. There is nothing left for us to pay.

The Only Way

There is only one way back to God (Acts 4:12). God designated Jesus to be the Savior of the world, and there is no one else His equal. The history of humanity is the story of ignoring God or attempting to define man-made pathways back to God. There seems to be a distinct aversion in some people to accepting God's way. Maybe it seems too easy since it doesn't require our punishment. Maybe it seems too hard because it requires us to depend fully on Jesus. The world calls Christians narrow minded because we will not accept any other way. The world tries to make us feel guilty by saying we have a closed mind. It is all right to be open-minded as long as you are not so open minded that your brains fall out. The truth is that there is no other way (1 Timothy 2:5&6). God told us that there is only His way or man's way (Jeremiah 21:8) and then gave us a subtle hint about which way to choose (Deuteronomy 30:19). The only one in the entire universe who can stand between God and humanity is Jesus, who is both God and man. There is only one who can grant eternal life (John 11:25&26). Jesus has power over life and death as well as the power to forgive sin. He is our Creator and source of life. There is absolutely no way to get back to God except through Jesus (John 14:6). The way is narrow, but it is wide enough for the whole world to get there. All other ways lead to

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death. Jesus is the way - the path to the Father. Jesus is the truth - the reality of God's promises, Jesus is the life - joining His divine life to our human life, making us new creatures, now and for eternity.

The Gift

Our efforts to save ourselves are not needed (Romans 3:24-26). There is no way we can ever earn what God offers as a free gift. When we are justified we are declared "Not Guilty", because Jesus took our guilt upon Himself. When we are redeemed we are freed from slavery to sin because Jesus paid the price for us. Faith is required (Romans 5:1). Faith in Jesus, trusting that He is who He said He is, and that He did all that will ever be required to save us. Faith trusts Him to be sufficient and all we will ever need (Galatians 2:16). Then we will be reconciled to God because there is no longer any blockage due to sin. Works are not required because no works we could ever accomplish would be sufficient to pay the price. Whenever you try to earn salvation you are saying that the work Jesus did on the cross was not sufficient to cover your sin. We are saved because of faith, and it is because we are saved that we try to be pleasing in God's sight, doing those things He wants us to do. Works are a sign of being saved, not a cause (James 2:17&18). It is strictly by God's grace that we are saved. Salvation is a gift (Romans 11:6), and by definition, you do not earn or pay for gifts.

Salvation belongs to the Lord (Ephesians 1:4). We did not see God and run to him; He called to us. Before the world even came into being He knew we would fail, and He already had a solution in place. Even knowing that many would fall away, because He is love He created us anyway for the sake of those who would return to Him. His solution was to credit us with what Jesus would do, and He decided before time that anyone who would accept Jesus would be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:13&14, Ephesians 1:4). Eternal life comes through knowing our God, and the only way to do that is through Jesus (John 17:3). We can only get to Jesus when we are called by the Father through the urging of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44&45). Salvation truly belongs to God, and if He had not initiated the action we would all be lost. All who turn to God are accepted (Joel 2:32). That is a message we must share (Ezekiel 3:18&19). Understand that the work of salvation was no easy task (Isaiah 52:10). Dealing with a bunch of stiff-necked creatures with big egos, like humans, is never easy.

Our Part

We do have a part to play in our own salvation (Philippians 2:12&13). It seems to be a contradiction to say that Jesus did all that was necessary, and then say we need to work out our salvation. However, we have an enemy who is out to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). We are living in his domain, and we are in a war that will last as long as we are in this world. Lions attack the sick, the young, the stragglers, the weary, and those who are not alert. You will be attacked when you are at your weakest. You need to understand that it is possible for a saved believer to abandon God and return to the old worldly life and never come back (Hebrews 6:4-6). That is death. It is also possible to accept God and then deliberately continue in some sin, denying that it is sin (Hebrews 10:26&27). It may be embezzlement (stealing), being abusive (failure to love), sexual promiscuity (fornication and adultery), or others, all of which are sin. Sin is death. Jesus completed the work of salvation. Now we have to maintain it in our own lives. Not only individuals need to maintain it; the entire church must be careful about what we believe and how we live, especially when we are on our own in the world. The world is watching closely and wants to see us fail.

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Our first necessary action is to become saved, and that is to repent (Acts 3:19). That means admitting to sin and then living as God intended. That's when the battle begins and we need God's strength (Ephesians 6:10). The enemy does not want us back in fellowship with God. We battle rulers and authorities and we cannot survive without the power of the Holy Spirit and the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-18). We must consciously stay rooted in Christ (John 15:4&5). We must be on our guard and stand firm with courage and strength (1 Corinthians 16:13, Galatians 5:1). We need to live in the Spirit (Philippians 1:27). You can be lost if you don't stand firm (Matthew 10:22) but you must realize that standing firm is evidence of commitment to Jesus, not a cause of salvation. Perseverance brings the crown of life (James 1:12). Do not allow the enemy to wear you down (Galatians 6:9) because he is only trying to get you weary enough to give up. Jesus said that if you endure you will eat of the tree of life (Revelation 2:7), you will not be hurt by the second death (Revelation 2:11), you will be given to eat of the hidden manna (Revelation 2:17), you will be saved, wear white raiment, and be in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 3:5), you will sit with Jesus in heaven (Revelation 3:21), and you will be sons of God and inherit all things (Revelation 21:7). If you think you are seeing a pattern here, you are right. The message is **never, ever give up**. The battle can be won. Anchor yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ and refuse to budge. Finally, order your life around God's desires so your whole life becomes a prayer, and continue to pray for the church (Ephesians 6:18).