

What Everyone Should Know About Salvation

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Introduction.

- A. In this series on first principles that we've been doing, many of the lessons have been real downers. It's simply not possible to deal with topics like the Bible and sin without looking at things from a justice-driven perspective. God's word sets up an exacting standard that all of us KNOW we don't measure up to. If we're honest with ourselves, we have to admit that on our own merits, we're headed somewhere we don't want to go, myself included. This is not a happy thought. Indeed, it can be an extremely depressing thought.
- B. Of course, this picture of life as a death march toward the judgment seat of God leaves out an aspect of His character that is every bit as important—His mercy. God might hate the things we do, but He loves every one of us, and is willing to go to amazing lengths to satisfy His sense of justice without killing us in the process. In fact, friends, the truest measure of God's desire to see us live is the fact that He sent His Son to earth to die for our sins. It's a lot easier for us to consider the judgment of God when the Judge loves us like that.
- C. However, we can't allow our appreciation of the mercy of God to take away from our respect for His justice. The power of the blood of Christ is infinite, but it does not automatically cover every human who has ever lived. The plain fact is, friends, that most people don't like God or want to do His will, and God isn't going to force people like that to be in heaven with Him when they clearly don't want to be. That means that God has set up a series of conditions for our redemption, and only when we show our love for Him by fulfilling those conditions does the blood of Christ cleanse us from our sin. These steps that save us are the most important actions we can ever take, and we need both to understand them ourselves and be able to teach them to others. With that purpose in mind, then, let's look at what everyone should know about salvation.

I. Salvation Generally.

- A. When we talk about salvation, the first thing we need to mention about it is its origin. According to the word of God, **IT COMES FROM CHRIST**. It is not the product of self-improvement. It is not the result of adherence to the teachings of any other religion, however well-meaning. The only way that we can be saved is through a spiritual sharing in the death of Jesus Christ. Look at what the Hebrews writer reveals about this in **HEBREWS 5:8-9**. This is both the reason why Jesus came and the reason why we must be Christians.
- B. Notice, though, that this text says that Jesus is the source of salvation not for everyone, but only to those that obey Him. This is significant, folks. It's not like we can steal salvation from the Lord like siphoning gas from someone else's tank. We only become saved when we do what He says. This seems like an obvious point, yet many in the religious world miss it completely. Through various forms of human reasoning, they come to the conclusion that we can be saved by praying the sinner's prayer or by being baptized as infants, yet neither of those things has anything to do with what Jesus said. That's not just playing with fire, friends. It's playing with fire in a dynamite factory. We literally cannot afford to get salvation wrong. We need to study God's word carefully, or else we may disobey Jesus and never come to know His great salvation.
- C. At the other end of the spectrum from those who act like they can make up the terms of their salvation are those who believe that most of us, no matter what we do, cannot be saved. This is untrue. The Bible teaches clearly of salvation that **IT IS AVAILABLE TO ALL**. Human beings are not marshmallows. God did not create us for the pleasure of roasting us. Instead, just as the dangers of sin are universal, so too the promise of salvation is universal. Look at what Paul says about God's attitude toward the lost in **1 TIMOTHY 2:3-4**. God wants everyone to be saved. Indeed, through Christ, He has made a way by which everyone can be.
- D. This is one of the greatest beauties of the grace of God. Nobody meets God's standards on their own, but He loves us enough to save every one of us, no matter what we've done, if we are willing. 1 Corinthians 6 tells us plainly that God will accept people who have wallowed in any imaginable sin. God still loves the adulterer and the thief and the drunkard and the homosexual, and He wants them to be with Him in heaven. That's true for us personally. We cannot go too far or fall too low for the grace of God to redeem us and bring us back.
- E. This salvation that is so far-reaching and precious, though, can only be learned about in one way. **IT IS TAUGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL**. This doesn't mean, of course, that someone must literally be reading out of the Bible in order to learn what he must do to be saved. The word "gospel" is only another way of saying "good news," and when we tell our co-worker or our friend at school the truth about God's will for his life, that's just as much the gospel as if we were reading it out of the book of Acts. We still have to be teaching things that come from God's word, of course, but using our own words to do that is acceptable to God too.
- F. We see what it is that this good news can do in **ROMANS 1:16-17**. It is the gospel of Christ that is able to warn man of his lost condition, tell him what he has to do to save himself, and inspire him to do it. It is through the gospel that we learn what we have to do to share in the righteousness of God. That means that if we don't hear the gospel, either from the word directly, or, more likely, from someone else, we cannot be

saved. This imposes, then, a special responsibility on all of us who know the gospel and have obeyed it. It is our role to make sure that everyone hears about salvation so that they can have the chance to be saved. Not everyone is going to listen, but God doesn't expect us to make everyone hear His word. He does expect us, though, to proclaim it, and when we fail in that, we bring responsibility for the blood of others on ourselves.

II. What We Must Do.

- A. This discussion about the general nature of salvation, then, brings us to ask what we have to do to be saved. Once we have heard the word of God, the Bible says of our salvation that **IT BEGINS WITH BELIEF**. Among many other places in Scripture, this is repeated most famously in **JOHN 3:16**. This is a verse that we have to be careful with. Sometimes, we spend so much time arguing with our friends and neighbors who believe that faith alone is enough to save that we forget how important faith truly is. Friends, every last Christian who has ever been saved was saved because of his faith in Jesus Christ. If we do not believe that Jesus is our Savior, we cannot be saved. This, in fact, is one of the big problems with the doctrine of infant baptism. In the first place, infants have not sinned and thus do not need to be saved from their sin. Second, though, even if they needed to be, they could not be, because babies are incapable of believing in Jesus Christ.
- B. Conversely, if we do truly believe that Jesus is the Savior, we will obey Him when He tells us what we must do to accomplish our salvation. Doing otherwise doesn't make any sense. It's like having pneumonia, going to the doctor, getting antibiotics from him, but then not taking the antibiotics because we believe that just having seen the doctor is enough by itself to make us well. I guess there are people who think that way about their health, but it's not a wise way to think, and if we think that way about our salvation, we aren't thinking in a wise way either. Let's not just claim to believe in Jesus, but also do what He says.
- C. Salvation may begin with belief, but it doesn't end there. **IT NEXT REQUIRES REPENTANCE**. Jesus will reach out to us wherever we are, but we can't stay there. We have to commit in our hearts to changing our wicked way of life, and then do our best to live up to that, before He will save us. This too is only common sense. After all, the governor of Illinois would never issue a pardon to a murderer who said that the first thing he would do once he got free was go out and murder someone else. No more will Jesus save us if we want to keep sinning. Consider what Paul says about this in **2 CORINTHIANS 7:10**. We can't just be sorry that our sins have gotten us in trouble; we have to be sorry for our rebellion against God before we can be saved. Note also that this text says that repentance leads to salvation but does not itself accomplish it. Repentance is a necessary part of salvation, but it is not everything that God requires from us before we are saved.
- D. After this, the Bible in its discussion of salvation says that **IT THEN DEMANDS CONFESSION**. We see the Bible teaching underlying this act in **ROMANS 10:9-10**. If we want Jesus to acknowledge us as one of His people on the day of judgment, we have to acknowledge Him here as our Lord first. This doesn't mean that we have to scream it out to Soldier Field during the next Bears game, but it is a confession of faith that someone must hear. For whatever reason, we typically follow Peter's confession of his faith in Matthew 16, but it is not necessary that we repeat that exact Scriptural formula. As long as we say that Jesus is our Lord, whether we use our own words or the Bible's, we are fulfilling the requirement imposed by Romans 10. Notice too, though, that this verse also doesn't say that we are done with salvation yet. Confession leads unto salvation, but it is not the point after which we can say, "I'm now saved from my sins."
- E. That point only comes when we carry out the final part of God's plan of salvation. **IT CONCLUDES WITH BAPTISM**. Scripturally speaking, baptism is immersion in water for the forgiveness of our sins. A whole bunch of our denominational friends have been with us every step of the way, but here's where they get off the bus. They say that if we believe that baptism is necessary for salvation, we believe that we're earning our way to heaven. That's not true for a second. Being baptized doesn't earn our salvation any more than repenting of our sins or confessing the name of Jesus does. Just like them, though, it is part of the obedience of faith. It is something we do not to save ourselves, but to appeal to Him who is able to save us. In fact, Peter describes baptism in exactly these terms in **1 PETER 3:21**. It doesn't save us by getting us clean; instead, it saves us because it is the way that Jesus has set up for us to call upon His authority to save. Only if we are baptized do we become New Testament Christians. Otherwise, we remain outside of Christ.
- F. Although we can rightfully claim to be saved after baptism, our salvation is not assured at that point. Instead, **IT DEPENDS ON FAITHFULNESS**. God expects us to strive to obey Him not just in following His plan of salvation, but in following the plan that He has set up for living godly lives. Let's examine what the Hebrews writer says about this idea in **HEBREWS 3:13-14**. Do you see that, friends? The only way that we become partakers in Christ is if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance until the end. If we don't do that, if once we have become Christians, we choose to return to the ungodly ways of the world, the Bible teaches that there is no other sacrifice for sins. There is no one who can save us but Jesus, and if we reject Him, He will also reject us. Remaining faithful to God after baptism is therefore the only way we can hope to see heaven. God wants us to follow Him to the end. That might be the end of our lives; it might be the end of the world if the Lord returns before we die. Either way, though, we can't ever stop serving God.

Conclusion. If you want to be saved from your sin, the only thing holding you back is you. Repent and return today.