

“29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (Acts 16:29-33).

HOW CAN A LOST PERSON BE SAVED?

Introduction

Loved ones, God wrote the book on salvation! That should not surprise us, seeing that He is "the God of our salvation" (Psalm 68:19).

Thank God that He gives each one of us the opportunity to have our sins forgiven. How can a lost person be saved from his/her past sins? Let us see what the Bible teaches about this great topic.

God Has Made Provision For Our Salvation

What is there that God has done to make salvation from sin possible?

The Bible points us to God's mercy, God's grace, and God's love.

These three great concepts are linked together in the following Bible passage:

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

GOD'S MERCY - What a sinner deserves for his/her sin against the Lord is eternal punishment, because "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

However, by His mercy, God allows us to escape such punishment. He permits us to avoid the horrors of hell.

Would it be correct, then, to think of salvation being by mercy? Yes, for the Bible says that "according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5).

GOD'S GRACE – This is kindness or favor that we do not deserve.

Again, by His mercy God allows us to escape that which we do deserve (Death in Hell), and by His grace He allows us to receive that which we do not deserve (Life in Christ).

So, is it safe to conclude that sinners are saved by the grace of God? Absolutely.

In Titus 2:11 it is written, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men."

The Bible is plain in showing that without God's mercy and grace, not one person would have a chance to be saved.

Is it possible for you and me to earn our salvation? No. Can we be saved simply by our good moral deeds? Never.

Would it be possible for us to devise our own scheme or checklist of actions whereby we might save ourselves? The answer is still "no."

GOD'S LOVE – What is there that motivates our Creator to make a way for all humans to be saved from sin? His love.

Because of God's great love, He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

In addition to God's love and desire for our salvation, we must not miss the action which He has taken to bring about such salvation.

The good news for us is that "the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14).

It was God's love that made it happen: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

Any person that is saved from sin owes the God of heaven a debt which he/she can never repay! Thank God for His mercy, His grace, and His great love.

Being Saved From Sin - Our Greatest Need!

The Bible tells us that redemption or salvation is available through and "in Jesus Christ with eternal glory" (Romans 3:24; 2 Tim. 2:10).

Why? Because before the foundations of the world it was God's plan to redeem the lost by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Even before the foundation of the world, that plan for our redemption was in place (1 Peter 1:18-20). What a great, loving God He is!

The Bible says that sin is "lawlessness" or "transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4).

It also reveals that all people have sinned, making every one of us a sinner (Romans 3:23).

The awful consequence of sin is that it separates a person from the God of heaven, and sin keeps him/her separated from Him.

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

Does this not mean that all of us are in a hopeless situation? Without Jesus, yes. But, through Jesus there is hope!

Remember, Jesus came into the world to save sinners (Luke 19:10), to give us a new life (Romans 6:3-4), and He accomplished it by shedding His blood on the cross of Calvary (John 19:32-34; cf. Romans 5:9-10).

Through Jesus' blood we can have our sins washed away and be reconciled to God (Romans 5:9-10).

Will All People Be Saved And Go To Heaven?

Jesus taught that there are two possible paths that we might take in life, and two possible destinies to which those paths lead.

“13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

NOTICE: One path leads to destruction, while a second leads to life. According to Jesus, those that enter the gate to destruction are "many," but those that enter into life are "few" in number.

The Christ further taught that while some will go into "life eternal," others will go into "everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:46).

Thus, while it is true that God's mercy, grace, and love makes salvation available or possible for all, NOT everyone will be saved eternally.

What About "Really Bad" Sinners?

As humans, we may tend to think that there are some sins that are worse than others. There is no doubt that some sins have greater earthly consequences than others do. Yet, in truth, any sin is horrendous and condemns the sinner.

Still, there are a lot of people that express the following or similar sentiments: "I have done such wicked things that there is no way that the Lord would/could ever forgive me."

The problem with such reasoning is simple: the Bible does not teach it. Instead, the Bible teaches that God is willing to forgive us of any and all past transgressions, regardless of what they might be (cf. Acts 26:9-11).

Before he became a Christian, Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul, greatly persecuted the Lord's church, even causing some of its members to be put to death (Acts 26:9-11). Yet, this evildoer was later saved by the grace of God.

We also read in the New Testament that thieves, drunkards, adulterers, homosexuals, idolaters, and other immoral people were saved from their past life of sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

So, yes, even those that some may count as "really bad" sinners can be saved by the blood of God's Son. God's salvation is available to all.

Salvation: Conditional, Or Unconditional?

There is no doubt that the Bible calls salvation a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). However, we know that some gifts or blessings in life are conditional, while others are unconditional.

What about salvation from sin, is it a conditional gift, or an unconditional one?

It is conditional, which simply means that God saves a person only when he/she complies with the terms or conditions that He has set forth in the gospel.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9).

Jesus saves. Jesus saves lost people. Which lost people does He save? According to Hebrews 5:9, Jesus saves those lost people that obey Him.

No obedience means no salvation. Therefore, salvation is conditional.

Jesus Himself taught that only those that do the will of God the Father shall enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21).

WHAT MUST A LOST PERSON DO TO BE SAVED?

We have already learned in our studies that redemption is made possible only through the blood of Jesus (Ephesians 1:7). Thus, if the question is, "What can wash away my sins?" the answer is "the blood of Jesus."

However, if we ask, "When does Jesus' blood wash away a lost person's sins?" that is an entirely different question.

Here is the scriptural answer: the blood of the Christ cleanses a person of past sins when he/she obeys Jesus ("obeys the gospel").

What does this obedience include? Just what must a lost person do in order to become a saved person?

Many people of our generation have never heard the correct answer to this question. Why? Because they have only listened to and been influenced by those that give a man-made answer instead of stating what the Bible teaches.

Maybe you have heard or read something like this: "In order to be saved from your sins, all you need to do is pray to Jesus, confess your sins to Him, and receive Him into your heart as your personal Savior."

This is an extremely popular and widespread idea that untold millions of people have accepted. It is sometimes called "the Sinner's Prayer."

But, do you know what? Such an idea is nowhere to be found in the Bible. It is just not in there!

"Pray to Jesus and confess your sins to Him" is another answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

The problem, though, my friend, is that this answer is not from the Bible, but rather comes from the imagination of man's heart.

In order to be saved, having faith or believing is certainly required, for "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6).

In whom or what must one believe? The Bible teaches that a person must believe in God's existence (Hebrews 11:6).

It also teaches that in order to be saved, a person must believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ... He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16, 18).

How does one become a believer? The Bible says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

So, one must hear or read the gospel before he/she can become a believer in Jesus.

Let us be clear in stating that the Bible clearly teaches that a person is saved or justified "by faith" (Romans 5:1), but it just as plainly shows that a person is not justified "by faith only" (James 2:24).

There is a huge difference in declaring that salvation is "by faith," and stating that it is "by faith only."

In addition to believing in Jesus as God's Son and our Savior, what else must one do in order to be saved from sin?

A person must repent of every past sin. In the first century, sinners were told, "Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

"Repent" does not mean simply to say, "I am sorry," but rather it means to change one's mind.

In the process of genuine repentance, after one has sinned against God: (1) He will regret what he has done/be sorry for it; (2) He will determine in his heart not to repeat this mistake i.e., he will change his will); and (3) He will change or reform his life.

Confession of faith in Jesus as LORD, the Son of God is also required. "9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10; cf. John 12:42-43).

We read in the Bible of some that believed on Jesus, but out of fear and pride, would not confess Him (John 12:42-43).

Jesus said that He will confess a person that confesses Him before men, but He will deny in the Father's presence anyone that refuses to confess Him (Matthew 10:32-33).

Baptism in water is another condition of salvation.

The Bible does not teach that one should be baptized after he is already saved. Nor does the Bible teach that a person ought to be baptized as an outward sign to show that he has been saved already prior to baptism.

Jesus Himself said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

According to these words of Jesus, who shall be saved? One that just believes? No. One that is just baptized? No. Rather, one who believes and is baptized.

If Jesus said it, how can it be wrong?!

In the New Testament, we also read that a sinner (Saul of Tarsus) was told, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

No, water cannot save a person. It is not water that washes away sins. It is the blood of Jesus that has the power to forgive and remove sins (Colossians 1:14), not water.

The question then is this: WHEN does the blood forgive by washing away sins; when does the blood save a lost soul?

The answer and condition is: WHEN a believing person "repents and is immersed in water in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins..." (Acts 2:38).

This is important, if God has made a condition of receiving the forgiveness of sins, then a lost person must comply with that condition.

Water baptism is a command of God (Acts 10:48), and we remember that only those who obey Jesus' commands are saved (Hebrews 5:9).

Baptism is no more important than hearing the gospel, believing in Jesus, repenting of sins, and confessing faith in Jesus, but like these other matters, it is required in order to be saved.

In fact, it is only through baptism that one can get into Christ where salvation is located (Romans 6:3; 2 Timothy 2:10).

We hasten to emphasize that in the New Testament, the word "baptism" means an immersion or plunging, not a sprinkling or pouring of water.

Baptism involves a burial (Colossians 2:12) and requires going down into the water and coming up out of the water (Acts 8:36-39). Scriptural baptism is an immersion.

Once a person has been saved from past sins and is a Christian, what then?

The Bible teaches that he becomes a child of God (Galatians 3:26-27) and is therefore given the Holy Spirit as an assurance of eternal life (Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Lord adds saved people to His church (Acts 2:47), so a saved person is a member of the body or church (ekklesia) of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27).

A believer who has, in a humble honest heart, repented and been baptized into the Christ is now a new person with a new Master, new desires, new priorities, and new obligations (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Being "baptized into Christ" is not the end of one's spiritual life in the Christ, but only marks the beginning of it.

After water baptism, one must live a life of faithful service to the Lord. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Jesus wants His followers to obey Him in all things (Matthew 28:20). He wants all Christians to put the Lord's Cause first in their lives (Matthew 6:33).

The Lord wants us to live a holy life, one in which we are distinct from the world in the way that we think, talk, act, and dress (Romans 12:1-2).

Attending the worship assemblies of the local church is an important aspect of a Christian's life (Hebrews 10:25), as is personal Bible study and prayer (1 Peter 2:2; Philippians 4:6-7).

In order for the church to grow spiritually and in number, it must actively teach the gospel to lost people, so teaching others ought to be part of the life of every child of God (Acts 8:4).

Conclusion

Christians are going to make mistakes. Praise God, we were forgiven of all past sins when we obeyed the gospel by being baptized for the remission of sins, but how do we obtain the cleansing of the sins that we commit after baptism?

A child of God that sins must repent of his/her sins, through prayer confess such sins to God, and trust and rejoice in the promise that the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse those sins from His record (Acts 8:21-22; 1 John 1:7-10).

Following Jesus is no small matter. He therefore says, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24).

Living as a Christian is a life-long commitment that requires our greatest effort and sacrifice. “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Being a Christian is not just one type of lifestyle, but rather it is the greatest life in the world! May the Lord bless you as you strive to live for Him.

Invitation