

The Good News of the Salvation of Jesus Christ

A Gospel Primer

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Introduction

We live in a time when many people are seeking meaning and happiness through personal fulfillment. In our modern pleasure-seeking culture we find an obsession with material things, entertainment (Hollywood, Las Vegas, sports, etc), leisure, personal peace and affluence. This modern self-centered spirit has even come to dominate many professing Christian churches in our land. On the one hand, there are the modernist churches which teach the latest loony left-wing ideas while arbitrarily labeling their own foolish fads as “Christian.” On the other hand, there is modern evangelicalism which gives lip service to biblical inerrancy and the Bible alone, yet which follows human pragmatism whenever it suits them. Both groups have to an extent taken the gospel of Jesus Christ and adapted it to modern culture. For the modernist, Jesus was a hip socialist who came to establish peace and justice. That is, peace and justice defined by Karl Marx and Fredric Engels. For the modern evangelical (in many cases) the Savior came to offer Himself to us so that we could be fulfilled—happy, successful, wealthy and healthy. The message is, “Let Jesus into your heart. He will solve your problems and make your life complete.”

America is a very religious country. Many people consider themselves to be Christian and even talk about Jesus and the Bible. But, they are ignorant of the true gospel—the real reasons why faith in Christ is absolutely necessary. Paul warned us about such a time. “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, head strong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away” (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Given the present circumstances let us examine the gospel, the good news regarding Christ. An examination of the Holy Scriptures will reveal that Jesus is not simply an add-on to life to make us more complete but is the Savior in the most comprehensive sense of that term. When we truly understand what Christ has accomplished we will understand why He must be the axis of our life—first in our love, our thoughts, our actions, our hope and our devotion. In our consideration of Jesus and the gospel we will examine four areas: first, man’s predicament or the need of a Savior; second, what Christ has accomplished; third, how do we appropriate Jesus’ accomplished redemption; fourth, how we must live as Christians in gratitude for salvation.

Man’s Predicament: The Necessity of the Gospel

When Christ ministered in the land of Palestine, the self-righteous Pharisees wanted to know why Jesus ate with tax collectors and [gross, vile] sinners. The Savior’s response is most illuminating. “He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who

are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mk. 2:17). The Lord’s point is not that some people are so good they do not need a savior (e.g., see Jn. 9:39-41; Rom. 3:9-20), but rather that people will not turn to Christ until they understand that without Him they have absolutely no hope of eternal life. There are a number of reasons why apart from Jesus men are guilty before God and doomed to hell.

First, all men without exception have violated God’s law and thus have a guilty record and the liability of punishment that accompanies any violation of the Ten Commandments. The Bible says, “The soul who sins must die” (Ezek. 18:4). Paul warns us of the coming judgment when he says, “knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things [sexual immorality, maliciousness, envy, murder, deceit, disobedience to parents, evil mindedness, etc.] are worthy of death” (Rom. 1:32). The apostle tells us that our record before God is not only bad, but that it is growing worse over time. “But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds” (Rom. 2:5-6; cf. Rev. 20:12).

Every “little” lie, every lustful thought, every bit of unjust anger, every filthy joke, every malicious thought, every curse word, every unlawful sex act, every dishonest business transaction, every disrespectful word or act towards one’s parents, every neglected Lord’s day and so on is recorded by God and will be recompensed on the day of judgment. Yes, your sins are adding up. Your curse under the law deepens every day you refuse to repent and believe in Christ. “It is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them’” (Gal. 3:10). “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). “He who believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36).

Perhaps you think that God only sends really bad people to hell like Adolf Hitler and Charles Manson. “I’m a good person. I don’t steal or cheat on my wife. I spend time with the children and even donate to various charities.” While it may be true that you are better than some people, it does not mean that you measure up to God’s perfect standard. God requires absolute moral perfection of all His rational creatures *even in their thoughts*. No wonder the Bible teaches that all men without exception are sinners and guilty before God. “There is none righteous, no not one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:9, 23). “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Eccl. 7:20). “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19-20).

Why does the law give us knowledge of our own sin? Because it sets forth God’s righteous requirements and no matter how hard we try we cannot perfectly meet these requirements. In other words, we miss the mark. Sure, you may not commit adultery or sleep with a prostitute, but when a Victoria’s Secret ad comes on television you lust in your heart. And that moment of lust is enough to condemn you before a thrice holy God. When Jesus wanted to condemn the self-righteous externalism of the Pharisees He said, “You have heard it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Mt. 5:27-29).

But (you say), “God is merciful; He will overlook my sins and let me into heaven. I can reform my life and do good deeds that counteract my bad works.” If you believe that, then you do not really understand the living God who created all things. Many people think that the Ten Commandments (or the moral law) are arbitrary; that if we say we are sorry for our bad deeds and try to do better God will forgive us. This view fails to take into account the fact that the Ten Commandments are not arbitrary but reflect who God is (that is, His nature or character).

God is holy (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8) and righteous (Gen. 18:25; Dt. 32:4; Ps. 89:14; Zeph. 3:5; Rom. 9:14; 1 Jn. 1:5). Therefore, His own being cannot clear the guilty (Ex. 34:7; Num. 14:18; Nah. 1:2) or justify (i.e. declare righteous) the wicked (Ex. 23:7). His whole being, of internal necessity, reacts with hatred against sin and evil (Ps. 5:4-6; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18). Therefore, for God to simply overlook sin (like it was no big deal), he would have to deny Himself or go against His own nature which is impossible (Tit. 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18). Therefore, anyone who has the hideous, unholy stain of sin on their record is guilty before God and under God’s just sentence of death (physical, spiritual and eternal). “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wickedness” (Hab. 1:13). “You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity” (Ps. 5:4-5).

It is absolutely crucial that you understand who God really is and how He views your sinful behavior before you examine the remedy to your situation. If you ignore what the Bible says about God and create a god of your own imagination or simply choose passages in Scripture about God that you like (e.g., God is loving, compassionate, merciful, forgiving, etc) while ignoring other passages (e.g., God’s holiness, righteousness and hatred of sin), then you are creating an idol, a false god so that you can continue your life of darkness and self-deception. Many people purposely ignore the perfect standard of God’s law. They refuse to face the reality of who God really is because they want to justify their own sinful behavior. All of this raises some very important questions. Are you willing to face reality? Are you ready to admit that apart from Christ your situation is hopeless? Are you prepared to admit that you are a sinner before God, guilty of violating His perfect standard and worthy of judgment? Do you now see the utter vanity and foolishness of living and believing a lie for the purpose of serving sinful pleasures? Dear friend, God is not mocked. The God with whom you have to deal does not tolerate sin or rebellion against His holy throne. Today is the day of salvation. Now is the time to believe in Christ and bow the knee to Him.

Christ’s Salvation: What Jesus Accomplished

After reading the first section of this little essay you may be tempted to sink into despair. After all, if God is holy and righteous and I am a sinner and God hates sinners and sends them to hell forever, then I’m doomed. While it is true that God is holy and cannot overlook sin, the Bible tells us that God has determined to save a people from the guilt and penalty of sin. Because of God’s moral, holy character He had to choose a method of saving men which honored His law; which did not overlook sin but rather paid the penalty for it in full. The apostle Paul put it this way, God’s method of salvation had to demonstrate “His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:36). This teaching is what separates Christianity from all other religious faiths. With Islam and modern Judaism men say they are sorry, turn over a new leaf and then God *overlooks* their sins. In these systems the guilt of sin and the liability of punishment that all sin deserves is not really dealt with but simply

arbitrarily set aside. The god of Islam and modern Judaism is most certainly not the God of the Bible. In our previous section we demonstrated that because of who God is, He cannot overlook sin or just forget about it. Sin must be paid for in full. Therefore, there are only two alternatives for men. They can either pay for their own sins by going to hell and suffering for their crimes against God or they can trust in a substitute who pays for their sins by suffering and dying in their place. It is Christ and Christ alone who meets all of our needs because only He eliminates the guilt and penalty of sin, satisfies God's wrath and reconciles a holy God with men. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin" (Eph. 1:7). Jesus has "made peace through the blood of the cross."

To fully understand what the Savior has accomplished we must consider a number of things about Christ and His mission. First, we must understand that He is a unique person. In order for Jesus to be the Mediator between God and man, He had to be both human and divine. Therefore, we should not be surprised to find that the Bible presents Jesus as the Son of God (Lk. 1:32, 35; Mt. 11:27; 14:28-33; 16:16; 21:33-46; 22:41-41; 26:63; Rom. 1:3; 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:1; etc.); who is *Emmanuel*—"God with us"—Mt. 1:23; who existed from eternity with the Father (Isa. 9:6; Jn. 1:1-3; 8:58; Rev. 1:8); who created all things (Jn. 1:2-3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3; 2:10; 3:3-4; Rev. 4:11; 10:6; Gen. 1:26); who is all powerful or omnipotent (Mk. 4:37-41 and parallels; Eph. 3:20; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 2:10; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 1:8; 2:26-27) and who is omnipresent (Mt. 18:20; Rom. 8:10; 1 Cor. 10:4; Rev. 2:1; 3:20). The Messiah is fully God in every way. One must never ever compare the Mediator with a regular prophet like Isaiah or with a false, lying prophet like Mohammed. Only once in all human history did God come to earth, unite Himself to a human nature and live among men. Why is it important that Christ is fully God? Jesus had to be God in order to offer a sacrifice of infinite value to the Father. If the Savior was only a sinless man and nothing more, then at the very most he could perhaps only have saved one person and no more.

The Messiah was not only fully God but also truly man: born of a virgin in Bethlehem (Isa. 7:14; Mic. 5:2); a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Lk. 3:34; Mt. 1:1-2) and David (2 Sam. 7:12; Lk. 3:32; Rom. 1:3); who had a real flesh and bones body (Mt. 4:2; 8:24; 21:18; 27:50, 57-61; Mk. 15:21; Lk. 22:44; 23:46; 24:39; Jn. 4:6; 19:21; 20:27-28; 1 Tim. 3:16; Ps. 22:14-18; 34:20; Isa. 53:9; 2 Cor. 5:16); and a genuine rational human soul (Mt. 8:10; 9:36; 26:38; Mk. 3:5; 6:6; 9:21; 10:14; Lk. 7:9; Jn. 2:15-17; 11:33-35; 12:27). The Savior was a human just like us, "yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Why is it very important that Jesus was truly human like us? If the Messiah was not a genuine, human person but only an angel, or God inhabiting a shell of flesh, or only appeared to be a man, then He could not have suffered on the cross and died for the sins of His people.

The person of Christ cannot be separated from the gospel. We must place our faith in who Jesus is and what He has done in our behalf. "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4). If you do not believe that Jesus is both truly God and truly man then you destroy the atonement and are identified by Scripture as an antichrist (see 1 Jn. 4:3; 2 Jn. 7).

Second, we must understand the Savior's central purpose which was to suffer and die in the place of His people. Theologians refer to this aspect of the Lord's work as His vicarious atonement. In order to remove our sins and the punishment that we deserved Jesus died in our place as our substitute. There are many passages in Scripture that teach that Christ bore the sins of His people. "Surely He has *borne* our griefs and *carried* our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him

stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded *for our transgressions*, He was bruised *for our iniquities*; the chastisement for our peace was *upon Him*, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has *laid on Him* the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:4-6). “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be sin* for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). “Christ also suffered for us...who Himself *bore* our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:21,24). “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). “Christ was offered to *bear* the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28). “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). The “Lord Jesus Christ...gave Himself for our sins” (Gal. 1:3-4).

When we believe in Jesus Christ, all of our guilt as liability of punishment is imputed to Jesus on the cross. All of our sins are reckoned to His account by God. Therefore, he eliminates the guilt of our sins and pays the full penalty that we deserved. He does it in our place so that we could be reconciled to God and have loving fellowship with Him. If you understand your guilt and your sinful nature and trust in what the Savior has done for you on the cross, then this is truly good news. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

When we examine all the things that Christ accomplished for His people on the cross by His suffering and death we see how amazing and comprehensive salvation truly is. The Savior’s work is so comprehensive that Scripture uses many different terms to help us comprehend its full meaning. Note the following biblical terms that shed light on the meaning and accomplishment of the Savior’s sacrificial death:

(a) The Bible teaches that Jesus’ bloody sacrificial death *expiates* sin. This word (expiation) refers to the fact that the Savior’s suffering and death *removes* the guilt and penalty for sin. There are many passages that discuss the removal of sin. Psalm 51 says, “*Blot out* my transgressions. *Wash me* thoroughly from my iniquity, and *cleanse* me from my sin.... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.... Hide your face from my sins, and blot out any iniquities” (vs. 2, 3, 7, 9). “When He had by Himself *purged* our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3). “He has appeared to *put away* sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son *cleanses* us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). “To Him who loved us and *washed* us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. 1:5). “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and *washed* their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). “The Lamb of God who *takes away* the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Dear friend, if you want to be forgiven by God and live forever in paradise with Him, then you must look to Christ and place your trust in Him for only He can remove your sins.

(b) By removing the guilt of sin and sin’s penalty Jesus *propitiated* God. Propitiation means that Christ totally eliminated God’s wrath against sin for those who trust in Him. As noted earlier, God is infinitely holy and righteous and thus hates sin with a perfect holy hatred. Jehovah is angry with sinners and will cast them into hell if the penalty for sin is not paid in full. “God is a consuming fire” (Dt. 4:24). “And God is angry with the wicked everyday” (Ps. 7:11). Because Jesus paid the penalty that we deserved and satisfied God’s perfect justice, God’s wrath against us is completely removed. The Savior endured the suffering and the torments of hell on the cross and now God has no reason (legal or otherwise) to be angry with us (i.e., everyone who believes in His Son). “Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a *propitiation* by His blood, through faith,

to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Rom. 3:25). “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make *propitiation* for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17). “And He Himself is the *propitiation* for our sins, and not for ours only but also the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2).

(c) The Savior not only eliminates guilt (expiation) and wrath (propitiation), but also *reconciles* God to the believing sinner. It is only logical that since Jesus dealt with the guilt and punishment that sin merits and thus eliminated God’s wrath against us, that he also restores us to a wonderful loving relationship with God. Christ’s salvation places us into God’s full favor and fellowship. Paul says that, “When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son...through our Lord Jesus Christ...we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5:10, 11). Reconciliation is the direct result of the forgiveness of sins. “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” (1 Cor. 5:18, 19). The salvation our Lord achieved is truly amazing. Jesus takes filthy, rotten sinners, who hate God, who are God’s enemies and under damnation and makes them white as snow. He makes them the friends of God.

(d) When the Bible discusses salvation it also uses the term *redemption*. This term teaches us that Christ secured our release from the guilt, penalty and bondage to sin by the payment of a price. That price was nothing less than the shedding of blood by the Lord—His suffering and death. Peter says that believers were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ.” Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders “to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). The apostle calls the church to sanctified living with the phrase: “For you were bought at a price”

Scripture teaches that Christ came to earth to give His life as a ransom price for the elect. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). Jesus was “born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5). Our Lord “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Tit. 2:14). “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of His grace” (Eph. 1:7; cf., Col. 1:14). Thus, the saints in heaven sing: “You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

We can heartily place our faith in Jesus because Scripture tells us that He paid the price in full. Christ did not make salvation possible if we follow certain rituals and do good works as heretical Roman Catholics assert; but He actually accomplished our redemption. He enables us to repent and believe in Him by sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts raising them up spiritually (regeneration). He also breaks the power of sin over our lives so that we can lead a Christian lifestyle (sanctification) of love and gratitude. We have a glorious complete redemption *solely* because of what the Savior has done for us. No wonder we will cast our crowns at His pierced feet when we behold Him in heaven (Rev. 4:10).

(e) Another very important biblical term is *justification*. When the Bible speaks of justification in reference to the work of Christ, it refers to God the Father’s verdict or declaration that the person who believes in Jesus is perfectly righteous because of what Jesus Christ has done. The believing sinner is declared righteous *solely* on the basis of the Savior’s full

satisfaction for sin on the cross and perfect obedience to the law. When a man *by faith* lays hold of Jesus Christ and His merits, God imputes that person's guilt for sins past, present and future upon Christ on the cross. God also imputes Christ's perfect righteousness to that sinner. The Father then declares that man righteous or just in the heavenly court. Because Christ has removed the guilt of that man's sins past, present, and future legally before God, it is as though that man never committed sin. He is white as snow (Isa. 1:18). His record is perfect. *Judicially*, he is just as righteous and perfect as Jesus Christ. Since Christ's perfect obedience is imputed to him, he has eternal life because Christ merited it for him. This means that we are not saved by our own works or anything that takes place within us but solely by faith in the person and work of Christ alone. Note the following passages:

By Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses (Ac. 13:39).

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:20-24).

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28).

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Gal. 2:16).

But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Phil. 3:8-9).

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).

So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do" (Lk. 17:10).

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish (Gal. 5:17).

If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand (Ps. 130:3)?

Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous (Ps. 143:2; cf. Rom. 7:15 ff.; Phil. 3:8-9).

Good works do not and cannot cause or contribute to justification but rather flow from it. Furthermore, good works are only acceptable before God through Christ (Eph. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5; Ex. 28:38).

Justification is a declaration of God (Rom. 8:33) that occurs the moment a person believes in Jesus (Lk. 23:43; Jn. 3:15; 5:24); that is instantaneous (Jn. 5:24; Lk. 18:14; Rom. 5:1); that takes place once and is never repeated; that is *not* a process; that is obtained solely by faith, *not* by works (Rom. 3:30). This doctrine is very important today because it is denied by Roman Catholics who seek salvation in Christ plus various rituals and the Romanist's own good deeds. Tragically, it is also ignored and perverted by many professing evangelicals. They equate the gospel with asking Jesus to come into one's heart (a subjective experience) instead of teaching the need for believing in or trusting Christ and His objective work. Dear Friend, when we are discussing the eternal state of your soul and the difference between bliss in heaven and the tortures and agony of hell, don't you think that it is important to get these matters right? When we are discussing salvation, our personal opinion or preference is irrelevant. What God says in His infallible word is what really matters. Do not follow the traditions or philosophies of men. Do not gamble with your own soul, but trust in Jesus *as He is revealed in Scripture*.

How Does One Appropriate Christ and His Perfect Redemption?

We have just seen that the Savior has achieved a perfect, sufficient, comprehensive redemption by His sinless life and sacrificial death (i.e. the substitutionary atonement, expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, justification). The all important question for every one of us is: How do I appropriate what Jesus has accomplished so that I am justified before God and possess eternal life? This question is crucial for all branches of Christendom acknowledge that God's Son died on a cross and rose from the dead. They all teach that the Savior's death has something to do with salvation. Sadly, however, very few professing Christians today understand the *instrumental means* of salvation. They want us to believe that we are saved by faith plus our own good works, or that we are saved by "covenantal perseverance," or that we are saved *because* of faith (i.e. faith as an autonomous self-generated act of the will). The Bible rejects all of these views. It teaches that God's people are justified by or through faith (*dia pisteos, ek pisteos, and pistei* [dative]; see Rom. 1:17; 3:25, 28, 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:11, 24; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9).

When the Bible repeatedly speaks of being justified "by" or "through" faith it is teaching that faith is the *instrument* by which we lay hold of Christ and His merits. Faith is like an empty vessel which grasps a great treasure or an eye which looks away from itself toward the Savior. While Jesus and His perfect accomplished redemption is the foundation or ground of salvation, faith is the instrument which receives salvation. Therefore, we must never say that we are saved *because* of faith as if it were meritorious or a work. We are saved through faith. True faith is always directed to the incarnate Word—Jesus Christ and the written Word—the Bible. True faith always acknowledges that we have nothing to contribute to our own salvation, that all our righteousness is as filthy rags, that apart from Christ we are hopeless, destitute, dead, and damned. By faith alone we confess everything the Bible teaches regarding the Savior; that He alone has accomplished a perfect redemption on our behalf.

True saving faith always has three elements: knowledge, belief and trust. Obviously if someone is going to believe in Jesus Christ he must know who the Savior is and what He has done. As Paul says, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Thus, the Puritans spoke of the "sum of saving knowledge." They understood that a person could

not be saved without first acquiring a certain amount of knowledge regarding God, man, sin, Jesus, salvation (and so on) from the Holy Scriptures (i.e. the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments). Faith or belief without a proper object of faith is absolutely useless and even harmful. Biblical faith is *not* a trust in the irrational, a leap in the dark, the acceptance of human speculation or a mindless commitment. It is the acceptance of or the believing in the propositional truths found in Scripture alone. If you want to know Christ, you must first know the Bible. An understanding of Scripture and doctrine is crucial if we are to know and love Jesus. The idea that is very common today that doctrine is somehow bad, or that we believe in a Person, not a book about the Person, is unbiblical, irrational rubbish. The more we know the Bible and the more we understand the doctrine taught within it, the richer and fuller our faith in God's Son will be.

Having accurate, biblical knowledge about the Savior, however, is not enough to save anyone. One must also *believe* what the Scriptures teach regarding Christ. There are many people who read the Bible or who grew up in a Christian home and know what it teaches that do not believe in Jesus. Some people believe the Bible is merely a human book full of myths, legends and fictitious stories. Sadly, such people will die in their sins and be cast into hell on the day of judgment by the resurrected, glorified Savior Himself (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11ff). Therefore, it is important for us to *both* know the truth and believe it. To believe in Jesus Christ is to believe that *everything* the Scriptures say about Him is true: He is fully God and fully man; born of a virgin in Bethlehem; lived a sinless life of perfection; was tortured and crucified as a blood sacrifice for His people; died and was in a state of death for three days; rose from the dead a vindicated, glorified, victorious King and ascended to the right hand of God the Father. Believing in the Savior means receiving Him (Jn. 1:12); coming to Him (Jn. 6:35), looking to Him (Isa. 45:22), fleeing to Him for refuge (Heb. 6:18) and trusting in Him (Pr. 3:5; Mt. 12:21). "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'" (Rom. 10:9-11).

In our day when many people say they believe in Jesus yet live like the devil, it is important to emphasize that believing in Christ involves a trust or reliance upon Him for salvation. Many people in our day have a dead faith, a faith that is merely historical, a profession that is counterfeit. Thus, the Bible repeatedly emphasizes that genuine faith results in a life of service to God. "By faith the Christian is said to be 'persuaded of the promises,' 'to obtain them,' 'to embrace them,' 'to subdue kingdoms,' 'to work righteousness,' 'to stop the mouth of lions.' Heb. xi. All this plainly presupposes that faith is not a bare intellectual conviction of the truth of truths revealed in the Scripture, but that it includes a hearty embrace of and a confident reliance upon Christ, his meritorious work and his gracious promises" (Charles Hodge).

Are you trusting in Christ for your salvation? Do you believe in the Bible and what it says about God, sin, Jesus, repentance and faith; or are you living in self-deception? Has your faith in the Savior really made a difference in your life or do you view the Messiah as merely a fire escape from hell? Your only hope is to trust in the Lord with all your heart, casting yourself upon His mercy. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Jn. 3:18).

How We Must Live as Christians

Although the Bible repeatedly emphasizes that we are saved by Christ alone apprehended by faith alone and that our own good works have absolutely nothing to do with our justification before God (e.g., see Ac. 13:39; Rom. 3:20-28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:8-9; etc), that teaching does not mean that Christians can live anyway they want to and sin as they please. On the contrary, Scripture emphasizes that God has saved us to obey Him, to do good works, to live a life of holiness for Christ. Paul writes, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God had prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).¹ The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (which is the pinnacle of the Protestant Reformation) puts it this way. It reads, “Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love” (11:2). One thing this means is that everyone who is justified is also sanctified by Christ.

Because God is holy He requires His people to be holy (Lev. 11:44-45; Ex. 19:6; Nu. 15:40; Dt. 23:14; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3). This makes a lot of sense when we consider that when we believe in Christ we receive the whole Savior. We trust in Him as Savior and *Lord* (see Rom. 14:7-9). Indeed, the message of the gospel is, “Believe on *the Lord* Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Ac. 16:31). The idea that is common among professing Christians today that a person can accept Jesus as Savior but not as Lord contradicts the explicit teaching of Scripture (e.g., see Ac. 16:31; 2 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 10:9, etc.). Therefore, if we say that we believe in Christ, yet refuse to submit to His authority and obey His law-word, then we really do not believe and we have refused to repent of our pagan lifestyle. “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments, He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:3-4).

Does this mean that Christians are sinless? No, definitely not! John says that anyone who claims to be sinless is a liar (1 Jn. 1:8). The Bible teaches that Christians sin. But, because Jesus has broken the power of sin over their lives (Rom. 6), they do not habitually walk in sin. This reality explains why the apostle John uses *present continuous verbs* five times in the third chapter of his first epistle to describe behavior that demonstrates that a person is not a real Christian but a hypocrite (read 3:4, 6, 9). A person who *continually walks* in sin has never really been born again. Their bad fruit or works demonstrate that their faith is dead, counterfeit or phony (Jas. 2:20). Perhaps you’re thinking, “I know I am a rotten, guilty sinner and need Jesus to save me from my sins, but I’ve been engrossed in sin and perversion for so long that I don’t see how I will be able to repent, put this lifestyle behind me and live a new godly Christian lifestyle.” Dear Friend, no matter how bad you have been and no matter how enslaved to sin you have been, do not give up hope because the Son of God saves the most vile of sinners from both the guilt and the *power of sin*. The apostle Paul taught that union with Christ in His death and

1 A main purpose of Christ’s ministry through Paul was “to make the Gentiles *obedient* (Rom. 15:18). Paul received his apostleship “for *obedience* in all things” (2 Cor. 2:9). The apostle noted the importance of keeping the moral law. “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Cor. 7:19). Peter concurs, “To the pilgrims of the Dispersion...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for *obedience* and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:1-2). Paul says that sanctification is essential if one is to serve Jesus Christ. “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21). Therefore, “[l]et everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19).

resurrection is not only the foundation of justification, but of sanctification as well. Anyone who partakes of the benefits of Christ's death for salvation also must die to sin and walk in newness of life. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism unto death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin....And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:1-7, 18).

The indicatives of Romans chapter 6 which speak of the reality of a believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection lead immediately to the imperatives of 6:12 and following. Since in chapter 6 a Christian's obligations are based on a historical reality (i.e., something that is true for every believer), one cannot deny the necessity of obedience without also denying the reality of the mystical union which is the foundation for personal holiness. To assert that believers can be justified without also being sanctified is to say that Christ removes the penalty of sin but not the power of it. Such thinking is a denial of the comprehensive nature of salvation which is taught throughout Scripture. Marshall writes, "The Gospel-faith maketh us to come to Christ with a thirsty appetite that we may drink of living water, even of His sanctifying Spirit (John 7:37, 38), and cry out earnestly to Him to save us, not only from Hell, but from sin, saying 'Teach us to do Thy will; Thy Spirit is good' (Ps. 143:10); 'Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned' (Jer. 31:18); 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me' (Ps. 51:10). This is the way whereby the doctrine of salvation by grace doth necessitate us to holiness of life, by constraining us to seek for it by faith in Christ, *as a substantial part* of that 'salvation' which is freely given to us through Christ."²

Does this wonderful victory over the power of sin by Christ mean that the Christian life is one that is easy with virtually no conflict whatsoever? No! The whole Christian life is one of warfare against sin because the remaining effects of sin upon our natures are not totally eradicated until we go to heaven. Paul tells us that we will have to fight against sin until we die (Rom. 7). The Bible makes it very clear that if we know and love Jesus we will never give up. We will work diligently for holiness (Phil. 2:12ff). "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8).

If you believe in Christ some of the things that you need to do for growth in grace are: (a) Join yourself to a Bible-believing, Reformed church that strictly adheres to one of the great Reformed confessions (e.g., *The Westminster Standards*; *The Heidelberg Catechism*; *The Belgic Confession*; *The Synod of Dordt*). A church that adheres to biblical inerrancy, that rejects the world (feminism, evolution, sodomite rights, socialism, abortion); that faithfully follows the achievements of the Protestant Reformation (e.g., Calvinism, biblical worship, Presbyterian church government, good preaching, church discipline); will disciple you and give you the tools to faithfully follow Christ. Further, it is crucial that you stop associating closely with pagans who will lead you into temptation and make solid Christian friends. (b) Get a good translation of the Bible such as the New King James version (avoid sloppy paraphrases such as the NIV) and study

² Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1692) as quoted in A. W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 27.

God's word every single day. Read it. Meditate upon it and seek to understand it. If there are areas of behavior where you are having temptations and difficulties (e.g., uncontrolled anger, sexual lust, filthy speech, etc.) you should buy a good concordance (e.g., *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*) look up appropriate passages and memorize verses that speak directly to your weak areas. Speak to the elders in your church and get advice on building up a good Christian library. (c) Diligently pray every day regarding your own physical and spiritual needs as well as those of others. (d) Faithfully attend the means of grace: the preached Word of God and the sacraments (e.g., the Lord's supper). God has ordained special means to help us grow spiritually and we must avail ourselves of these means. Many churches have a mid-week prayer service. Make every effort to pray with and for the saints.

Conclusion

Anyone who is honest with himself will acknowledge that he is a guilty sinner in need of salvation. Only someone blinded by Satan and living in self-deception would think that he could achieve salvation by his own sin-stained works. Therefore, we must admit our sin and guilt before God and seek salvation in the person and work of the divine-human mediator Jesus Christ. We must lay hold of what He has done by the instrument of faith alone. Then after we are justified by the Savior we must serve and obey Him (sanctification) *not* in order to be saved, but to show our love and gratitude for a perfect salvation *already achieved*. Our good works demonstrate the reality of our faith. On the day when our precious Savior returns we will observe the scars on His hands, side and feet and we will weep tears of joy and cast our jeweled crowns at His pierced feet. God, enable us by the power of Your Holy Spirit to behold Your dear Son with the eyes of faith; cause us to love Him with all of our hearts and faithfully serve Him the rest of our lives. Amen.

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