



"Believing right doctrine will no more save you than doing good works will save you."

—Charles H. Spurgeon

30-Jan-15

Salvation: The Path to God's Kingdom (Part One)

We sometimes take for granted what a precious honor it is to have been included in God's plan of salvation. To think that [God](#) chose us from the billions of people who have ever lived and opened our minds to the knowledge of His truth and the way to salvation! It is at the same time humbling and exhilarating to contemplate the majesty of God's plan to save mankind from [sin](#).

God's plan of salvation has past, present, and future aspects, and each has its own rewards. Salvation means that, when we initially come under the blood of Christ's sacrifice, we have the blessing of freedom from the penalty that we earned by our *past* sins. It also means that, as we live God's way of life, we have the freedom from fear of God's eternal punishment for our *present* missteps. Living God's way involves a personal relationship with both the Father and the Son, a priceless opportunity for those whom God has called ([John 6:44](#)). Finally, salvation means that, after being changed and given immortality in the still-*future* resurrection ([I Corinthians 15:51-54](#)), we will live forever with God in perfect [peace](#), harmony, and health, and without sin and its consequences.

The Bible uses "salvation" and its related words just over 600 times. Salvation is the goal of God's Word, the outcome that God intends to accomplish in each one of us ([I Timothy 2:4](#)). To most of us, this is nothing new, but sometimes it is helpful to review and refresh our understanding of the steps in the process that God is using to bring us there.

Researchers have discovered that when a person tries to accomplish something, the best way to attain the goal is to set incremental steps along the way, and God is taking such a path with us to bring us to salvation. Dr. Senia Maymin describes a study of a group of school-aged children who were given an assignment. Roughly half of them were given the task of completing 42 pages of math problems over seven sessions, and the other children were told to complete six pages of math problems at each of the seven sessions. The students with the incremental goals completed each of the sessions on average 30% faster. What is more, the students with the smaller "sub-goals" performed significantly better on the problems than those with the larger goal. Summarizing the lesson of the experiment, Dr. Maymin exhorts her readers to focus on the process, not the outcome.

For us, salvation began when we accepted the blood of Christ as payment for the penalty of our sins and we were baptized. Three verses will affirm that our salvation is past tense:

- [Ephesians 2:8](#): "For by grace you *have been* saved through [faith](#). . . ."
- [II Timothy 1:9](#): "[God] who *has saved us* and called us with a holy calling. . . ."
- [Titus 3:5](#): "according to [God's] mercy *He saved us*, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Emphasis ours throughout.)

We read of this initial saving of us in [Romans 3:25](#): "God set forth [Jesus] *as* 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." Just as the Israelites were delivered or rescued or saved from Egypt on that first [Passover](#), when we first came under the blood of our Passover, [Jesus Christ](#) ([I Corinthians 5:7](#)), we were saved from the

death penalty. However, it was only the first step in the process that we know as salvation.

This first step sometimes goes by another name, justification. In his sermon, "Grace Upon Grace," John Ritenbaugh teaches:

God never judges unrighteously. He knows all the facts. He knows our heart. He knows everything about us. He knows everything about every situation that we have been in, and so He cannot vindicate us because we are not clear of guilt. He cannot exonerate us because we are not free of guilt. Justification . . . is setting us right or calling us righteous where it does not even exist. . . . Justification is righteousness. God simply declares us innocent. He simply declares us righteous. He does it legally on the basis of Christ's sacrifice.

The second step is currently ongoing. The apostle Paul writes in [I Corinthians 1:18](#) and [II Corinthians 2:15](#) that we are "*being saved*." *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* gives as one of the definitions of *salvation*, "the present possession of all true Christians." The Greek word for "salvation" in the New Testament is *s?t?ria*, which means "deliverance," "preservation," and "safety," as well as the theological concept of "salvation."

In [Luke 19:8](#), the rich tax collector, Zacchaeus, professes faith in Jesus and promises to live charitably and humbly, and Jesus replies, "Today salvation has come to this house" (verse 9). In this illustration, faithfully changing the way one lives is identified with salvation. This is the step in God's salvation process called "sanctification," when we become set apart by learning to live as God lives, which we begin to do by obeying His laws.

At this point, the oft-repeated analogy of justification with a word-processed document takes a turn. The writer sets the document's margins and determines whether the content is to be left-, right-, or center-justified. From this point on, the document must conform to the setting in order to remain justified. As the living document God is writing, we have to conform to the rules He established in order to be prepared, completed, and "published." Since God is writing the story of our lives in partnership with us, we are required to make efforts to live "within the margins."

This "work" does not save us; we are saved by God's grace ([Ephesians 2:8](#)). Its purpose is to change us so that our lives reflect Jesus Christ, and for people who have been called out of an anti-God world, that takes work! We will learn more about this process of salvation in Part Two.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Camouflage and Salvation](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Satan, the grand master of deception, has provided what appear to be plausible alternatives to Christ's sacrifice for salvation. We are saved through a combination of the sinless life of Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, and His intercessory work as our High Priest. Some believable counterfeits, which (in many people's minds) compete for Christ's sacrifice and His intercessory priestly work are: (1) service in behalf of the brethren, (2) making a positive change or "turning over a new leaf," (3) right thinking, (4) denying ourselves (asceticism), and (5) sacrifice (even the supreme sacrifice). Though they are required of us, they do not save us. Salvation is the work of Jesus Christ.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Righteousness from Inside-Out](#)

by David F. Maas

Many people, even in the church, fail to understand the kind of righteousness God is looking for. David Maas shows that God wants it written on our hearts—not just a set of dos and don'ts or rewards and punishments.

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