

Salvation... a free gift from God...

What is this Salvation?

Christian salvation is something quite unique in religious beliefs. That is not to say that Christianity is 'religious' - it is not. It is a system of belief in, and upon, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian 'Lord', who Christians believe is the Son of God, a resurrected being who shares the heavenly throne with His Father. Christianity is a personal relationship between each believer and his Saviour.

We read in the letter (epistle) which Paul the Apostle - Sha'ul in Hebrew, Paulus in Latin - wrote to the Romans probably around 57AD, where he states what the conditions for salvation are. They are expressed in various forms in the New Testament portion of the Bible, but I believe this is the most concise...

- *... that 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.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'* (Romans 10:9-13)

We can also read it most definitively defined as being an ongoing process in three other places in the New Testament, rather than it being a passive positional state - and this shift in meaning is correctly made when the tense of the original words is taken into account. The New Testament was not written in English, it was written in Greek...

- *So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily **those who were being saved**.* (Acts 2:46-47)
- *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to **us who are being saved** it is the power of God.* (1 Corinthians 1:18)
- *Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among **those who are being saved** and among those who are perishing.* (2 Corinthians 2:14-15)

In each case we have quoted from the New King James version. There is a majority of translations which support this interpretation.

As a point of interest, the same tense is used for perishing as being saved in 'among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing', and nobody could deny that those who are perishing are being subjected to such a process - **they have not yet actually perished**.

Do I need to do anything about this Salvation?

Well the answer to that is one of those 'yes and no' answers, perhaps a bit like the '*I have some good news and some bad news*' jokes. It is not simple by any stretch of the imagination, although on the face of it, it seems like that.

If you read what Paul taught, it is quite clear that **you do not need to do anything in order to gain salvation from God apart from accepting the sacrifice which Jesus made on your and my behalf**. Salvation is offered to each of us, individually, as a free gift, no strings attached, on the single provision that you will accept Jesus Christ as your saviour, and be prepared to say so out loud, in front of other people, and then to continue to call upon His Name.

Having said that, it is necessary to see exactly what that scripture is actually saying.

It is saying several things which you may have not realised it is saying.

Firstly, it is saying that you have to need to recognise why you need to have salvation. We'll come to that shortly. That is the point argued over by all non-Christians and many self-proclaimed Christians who say 'I am living a good life, I do not need someone to save me'. That is the question of 'sin'.

Secondly it says that we are to openly state - not just once, but as often as it is necessary, and in front of others who may not agree with your viewpoint - that you accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Now that is very much harder. However, contrary to what some people will suggest, it does **not** mean that you need to go out of your way to deliberately antagonise those who do not share your views.

However what it does mean is that by the way you live your life, speak, and relate to others in fairness and respect, they will know that you are indeed following Christ, and if the opportunity presents itself, you do '*confess Jesus Christ with your mouth*' without any bravado, antagonism or sense of being elite. This is also done without your feeling any shame for so doing, nor a need to apologise for your viewpoint either.

Now that is all very much harder, isn't it?

Next we come to the third part of what Paul wrote. ***For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'*** What do you think that means?

I am convinced that it says that you have accepted an ongoing responsibility to continually involve '*The Lord*' in every single aspect of your life. That means you include Him in your decision-making, your wrestling with whether or not to do, think, or say something... the way in which you drive your car... how you treat other people...

It means, effectively, that you have contracted to do these things, and in return God has contracted to save you. He cannot break His word. He never has, and never will. It is totally contrary to His nature of perfect love.

You, however, can, and we all do to some degree or another. Have you heard the pathetic excuse *'I am only human, you know'* ?

Being human is not any **excuse** for wilfully and deliberately doing anything you know Christ would not have done. It is, however, a **reason** for your failure, and if you are living wrongly while **calling on the name of the LORD** you will find that you will realise what needs to be addressed and put right in your life on a regular basis. It is then your choice to put it right or continue on with the wrong self-centered attitude.

Having said that, **if you have chosen the opposite route - not to have Christ in your life**, you will seldom realise what things you are doing that need fixing, nor indeed have the ability to do the fixing.

I hear you say *'I was never told anything like that when I became a Christian'*. It is more than likely you were not, because among a very large number of Christians, this is one of several *'hot potatoes'* they don't wish to get involved in.

Suppose I don't want this Salvation?

You might even be thinking *'I would never have made that commitment had I known'*. Well, I'm sorry, but you did make that commitment. How are you going to get out of it? You could try telling God *'I don't give a stuff for You, nor what You would dearly like to see me become'* Sure, you can do that, and many people have. This is a point where some Christians disagree about whether or no you can lose salvation.

This Salvation - Can I lose it?

Bear in mind that God is completely just and has promised us that He will completely overlook whatever we think, say, and do providing we accept Him and Jesus. He is also completely holy... that is His nature, not just an adjective, nor even a lifestyle. Absolutely nothing imperfect can live in His presence. But He has given each of us a way to 'get right with Him'.

If nothing imperfect can live in His presence, is He going to allow you to be there if you refuse to place yourself in His hands?

Bear in mind also that He does not break any agreement from His side. But an agreement broken on your side may very well have far-reaching consequences. That is certainly true in this imperfect life we lead here, in this imperfect world.

We need to remember that we have been cautioned by God, through Jesus, not to judge others. There are many instances of this, perhaps the best known being the instruction to remove the 10-foot long plank from your own eye before telling someone else about a speck of dust in theirs.

Therefore, if God does choose to say 'you have lost your salvation', that is entirely His business, and none of ours. Christians are NOT in the business of determining who is saved, and who is not, nor why or why not.

Not judging does NOT mean that you don't prepare yourself for what nastiness may be done to you by someone whose nastiness you no longer bear a grudge against. That is forgiveness; you owe it to God to use the intelligence, mind and brain that He gave you to be prepared for an onslaught.

Make sure you are walking with God, with the right heart attitude. Don't judge others.

What is 'Sin' that we need Salvation from?

In its simplest form, it can be described as following our own self-centred will, to do our own thing, and ignoring both God's existence and His will towards us. That sounds very airy-fairy, doesn't it?

In practical terms, it means unrelational behaviour towards all people. Starting with a child towards its parents, and later towards his or her oversight in the school system. Subsequently one spouse in relation to the other, and here there is a difference of opinion between some Christians who see the Bible teaching that God has a 'family order' laid out, and others who do not see it that way.

Then there is relational - or non-relational - behaviour between employer and employee, and between government and citizen. Bear in mind that in an imperfect world those you try to relate to and with are also as imperfect as you are. That does not mean we should not try, and keep trying.

Perhaps we could say that any attempt at a personal independence away from what you can see as God's teachings is definable as sin. It is far more than a catalogue of ten things which you may, or may not, do. Most certainly, few Christians would believe that there are seven 'deadly' ones and a list of less important ones.

Christians believe that sin started in the Garden of Eden immediately before Adam and Eve were evicted by God, and then kept out by a pair of security guards with flaming swords who stopped their return. While some Christians believe that is a figurative and not a literal description, there is absolutely no doubt that the reason Eve, and then Adam, ate the fruit of the forbidden tree was out of disobedience.

Adam had been initially briefed by God that he could in effect do whatever he wished ***apart from picking this particular fruit***. He was even told of the name of the tree. He then told Eve. They both knew. He was told of the consequences... death hadn't happened, and could not because creation was immortal, eternal.

What was the result of their eating, and then banishment? They died, mortal or physical death (eventually), and this was outside of the relational commune established by God. They were also

immediately removed from direct contact with God, instant spiritual death, outside the relational situation of face-to-face communication with God.

Don't think for a moment that God didn't expect this to happen, and that He had to implement a **'Plan B'**. He didn't.

He foresaw this, and from before the Garden of Eden, He had already planned that Jesus would come to redeem mankind from the fall He knew would happen.

Disobedience is the first active step into a non-relational independent *'I know better'* living system. The human race has degenerated from that point, and is still doing so.

Now, since Jesus came to earth to take full personal responsibility for that act of Adam and Eve, and for those of you and me, there is a way out, but it is only on God's terms, not ours.

Updated 10th February, 2000