

There are certain facts about our salvation that are essential to understand. (Cf. John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:2-5; Romans 10:9.) Without them, we may have missed the gospel message. Many who claim to be Christian do not give answers which reveal a proper understanding of salvation. The Biblical teaching on salvation has certain basic truths.

I. Man is separated from God, condemned and without hope apart from Christ.

The Bible speaks of our condition in various ways, such as ...

1. spiritual dead (Eph 2:1, 5)
2. by nature objects of wrath (Eph 2:3)
3. unable to save ourselves (Eph 2:8-9)
4. without hope (Eph 2:12)
5. enemies of God (Rom 5:10; cf. Eph 2:17)
6. perishing and spiritually blinded (2 Corinthians 4:3-6; cf. Col 1:13; John 3:19-21)
7. condemned (John 3:18)

Because of our sin we are separated from God, condemned, under His wrath, and without hope apart from Christ. This is our primary problem and part of the core of the gospel: Christ died for our sins.

II. Salvation is provided totally by God and is received by faith.

1. *God provided a substitute for us to satisfy the righteous demands of His holy character.*

God's holiness demands payment of the penalty of sin: death. But God has provided a substitute for us. Jesus Christ is our substitute (2 Cor 5:21; Mark 10:45). His death was a ransom providing redemption (a price that is paid to set free someone or something). The death of Jesus set free the believer from the penalty of the law (Galatians 3:13) among other things. Christ's death sufficiently satisfied the righteous demands of the holiness of God and paid the penalty of sin (1 John 2:2; Rom 3:25). Through Christ's death God can now relate to man in a different way, i.e., God reconciled us to Himself (Rom 5:10). We cannot save ourselves nor earn salvation, but God provided in Christ a payment for the penalty of sin.

2. *By grace God has chosen to save some through the preaching of the gospel.*

The Bible teaches both God's sovereign choice and man's responsibility. Various examples in Scripture show both to be present at the same time (e.g., compare John 6:44 with Matthew 23:37). We should never hold to the doctrine of election in a way that excludes the need to preach the gospel – it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). But we need also recognize that God must be active as well. Furthermore, all of this is by grace in order that God be praised and no one boast (Eph 2:9).

3. *Man is held responsible to change his mind about sin and God (repentance), commit himself to God in Christ (faith), and head in a new direction in life (conversion).*

- a. Repentance is a change of mind away from sin and toward God and particularly concerns our thinking about Christ (Heb 6:1; Acts 20:21) which results in a changed life (cf. Mt 3:8). It is both God's work (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25) and man's responsibility (Luke 13:3; 24:46-47).
- b. Faith is perhaps the supreme response (Heb 11:6; John 6:28-29). It does not earn salvation (Rom 4:4-5) but agrees to certain facts (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-5; 1 John 5:1), receives Christ as Savior (John 1:12), and entrusting oneself to Christ (cf. 2 Tim 1:12). Faith has as its object Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31; 1 Thes 4:14) and will evidence itself in obedience and perseverance (John 8:31; Eph 2:10).
- c. "Conversion" seems to emphasize the changed life with changed thinking as a background. It is a work of God and responsibility of man in which one turns away from sin (Acts 3:26) and turns to God (Acts 9:35; 14:15; 1 Thess 1:9).

Understanding that salvation is God's gracious work that must be received by faith should affect how we live our lives and how we share the Gospel.

III. This saving work of God results in immediate benefit for the believer although it will not be completed until the future.

We will look more at the continuing aspects of salvation next month, but today it is helpful to highlight what happens when a person truly places their trust in Jesus Christ.

1. *The true believer is justified* or declared righteous on the basis of the death of Christ which Christ suffered in the believer's place. It is by grace (Rom 3:24), based on the death of Christ (Rom 5:9), guaranteed by Christ's resurrection (Rom 4:24-25) and is the basis for all other blessings of salvation (Rom 5:1ff).
2. *The true believer is placed in Christ* or united with Christ (Rom 8:1; Eph 1:22-23; Romans 7:1-4; Eph 2:20-22; 5:31-32; 1 Cor 6:15-17). This union is absolutely essential (1 John 5:11-12), grants all spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3), identifies us with Christ in his death (Col 2:20), burial (Rom 6:4), resurrection & exaltation (Eph 2:6). We are made complete in Him (Col 2:10) and are joined with other believers (Gal 3:28). It should lead us away from legalism and away from worldliness (Col 2:20-3:1).
3. *The true believer is born again* (John 3:7) and becomes a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).
4. *The true believer also receives adoption* which emphasizes the rights and responsibilities which come with being a child of God (see Gal 4:1-6) including assurance of God as our Father, the Holy Spirit, an inheritance, and freedom from fear.

When a person comes to God through Christ, he or she becomes a new creation and changes should occur. If there is no change, then there is reason to question if there is saving faith. In this life we do not become perfect, but continue to struggle with sin. In fact, the more we grow in our faith, the more aware of sin we will become. The salvation message is not first of all a call to a different life-style. It is a call to change one's mind about sin and come to God through Jesus Christ. That should result in a different life.